

Tale the Sixth

Concerning them that did put Coal upon the Home Fires and found for themselves soft jobs

Lest there be misinterpretation, let it be known that many there were that could not go unto the Great War; for some were old in years and the hairs of their heads were gray, and some had an ailment of the body that did hamper them.

Of such as these and of others that were indispensable in the arts and crafts of the civilian, nothing but good may be spoken; for verily and in truth, they have done their bit.

But, in the City of Van, there are a multitude of Heroes that became "gassed at Mons"; verily, did they become fearsome and, as the foxes of the field, they did seek them each his hole.

Yet did they at the outset get them commissions and did array themselves in martial splendour and looked "fetching."

And is it not written in the Book of the Chronicles, compiled and edited by certain of the fair ones of the City of Van, how resplendent such heroes are, and how they did make their buttons and their boots and their leggings to shine, so that the common soldier returning from hell did look upon them and become as one that looketh at the sun and is dazzled.

Verily, verily did their buttons shine and their boots also, and when it came to pass that they were promoted to the staff they did put upon themselves red tabs and much gold braid.

And the dear ladies that do willingly fall for such things cried out, after that they had first drawn a long, long breath, "Oh, how bewildering."

And these heroes did say among themselves: "Lo, we are the salt of the earth. The brains within our heads

do weigh many ounces, and because of it we know what's what."

And one there was that liked him not the roar of the howitzer, and became yellow in the face when the machine gun did play its death-tattoo.

So he took counsel with himself saying: "Verily, thou art of much importance and the drums of thine ears are sensitive and will not stand the crude noise of belching cannon and bursting shells;

"Moreover, thy belly is of delicate fashioning and would never take kindly to the rough food of war, and thy limbs they are beautiful and tender and cannot become rested on aught save a spring mattress;

"And thy mind, it is a wonderful mind and thou canst do great deeds in an office."

And lo, he did "wangle" it, and did become in due course Colonel of the Fireside Lancers.

And of another it is written that he could feign madness.

Unto him likewise the "sport of kings" appealed not, and when the time came that he should go and wallow in the oozy trench, he became cold all over and his eyes did wobble and he foamed at the mouth and spoke strange words.

And he did "go sick."

And after that he was examined by a Board and was pronounced "dangerous to the enemy," he did find him a soft job.

Verily, he sat him in an office from 11 ack emma until 1 pip emma and looked wise and bored alternately.

And after that his toil was done, he would promenade the streets, and many sweet ones did admire him say-