

Soldiers' Wives and "Women of Brains"

By THE MONOCLE MAN

I PICKED up a paper the other day and read an account of a Patriotic Fund meeting in which a lady made the following remarks touching the wives of soldiers whom the Fund assisted:

"We have been fostering extravagance and wastefulness. They should do their full share of the war work instead of gadding to the moving picture shows and spending their afternoons shopping. No Toronto lady can get a charwoman to do her work unless she makes arrangements two weeks in advance. It is disgraceful that women of brains, who ought to be in patriotic work, have to work at home."

I HAVE not given the lady's name—though the newspapers were not so kind. I entertain the hope that she was mis-reported. Then, if that was really what she said, I feel that it would be cruel to pillory the poor shrivelled soul, and further humiliate her friends, for utterances that can only reveal either a mental or a cardiac condition which must humiliate them daily. Still occasionally stories do come to me which suggest that this point of view is not wholly monopolized by the lady in question. Never before have I heard it put so bluntly. But there is, perhaps, enough of this feeling at large in the community—born in some cases of lack of thought about the situation—to make it worth while to say a few plain words on this subject of soldiers' wives.

YOU will notice that the lady I have quoted above begins her complaint by saying that these soldiers' wives "should do their full share of the war work." This sounds reasonable and patriotic. But, in the next sentence, you discover that what she really means is that these soldiers' wives "should do her share of her own housework." Her idea clearly is that these honoured ladies of our war heroes—whom we were frantically cheering just the other day—should do their share of this glorious "war work"—in her kitchen. And she thinks it "disgraceful" that they won't do it.

BUT what about the feelings of the war hero?—and he, after all, is the man to be considered. It is to be presumed that he thinks highly of his wife—the mother of his children—even if she is not

"a woman of brains" in the sense that she can make her living without soiling her hands. It is quite possible that he imagines that she IS "a woman of brains"—though her "brains" may not have been given that technical training which would turn them into a deft and polished instrument for making money. There is often much more "brains" in the head of the modest woman who stays at home, manages a house, and possibly brings up a family of children, than in that of the venerated and dashing de-feminized specimen who regards it as "disgraceful" to "work at home" and "brainless" to make a show in public.

ANYWAY, the soldier—if he is a decent sort, as most of them are—loves his wife. He does not like to see her charring for other women. He does not admit for a moment that she is inferior to other women. If he should get a better job at home, which gave him money enough to support his family without her earnings, the first thing he would do would be to tell her to give up "working out," and enjoy such leisure as she had like the wives of richer men. He would not object to her "gadding to the moving picture shows"—he would be proud and happy that she could do it, like other ladies, if she wanted to. That is chiefly what he would covet the better job for. He would want, above all things, to "buy his wife's liberty" from the necessity of serving "women of brains"—so self-designated. He would release her from servitude in any kitchen but her own, and free her from taking orders from any other man's wife.

AND he might very easily get a better job if he stayed at home. For workmen are getting scarcer. If he followed his own selfish interest, and sought this better job, the "woman of brains" would be the first to blame him if he still permitted his wife to "work out" after having got it. She would then accuse him of wasting his better pay in drink, and making his poor and neglected wife scrub and wash to support him. She could quite understand such a man, having succeeded in lifting himself up in the world, wanting to lift his wife with him.

BUT if instead of staying at home and serving his own selfish interests, this man enlists and goes to war for his country, does he deserve less consideration than the man who does stay at home and make money? If he gives up his chance to get a better job in order to do his duty, is he more worthy of contempt for "women of brains" than his fellow citizen who refuses to enlist and worms himself into this better job? According to all standards of honour, has the volunteer soldier taken a better job, or a worse job, than the self-seeker? He goes into danger that you and I may stay safely at home and still live a life of liberty. He offers to risk death for us—yea, even for the "woman of brains" who is so indignant that his wife will no longer char in her kitchen. We tell him to his face that he is a hero—and yet the moment his khaki-ed back is turned, we insult his best beloved if she will not get down on her knees and scrub our dirty floors for us.

DO we lie when we pretend to appreciate his sacrifice? Either that—or we forget. We treat him worse than we would dream of doing if he had stuck at home and taken the job of the man who went. If he stays here and makes more money, we take off our hats to his wife. But if he goes nobly off to fight our battles for us, leaving his wife to our chivalrous care and protection, we peddle out charity to her as if all the nobility of soul were in our bosoms, and we are amazed if she does not realize that she has a great deal to be grateful for. She has given us the most priceless possession any woman ever had—her man. And we talk—some of us—as if it were possible for us to give her alms. If we emptied the vaults of all the banks into her lap, we would still be in her debt. The Patriotic Fund is but a small instalment on the heavy obligation we owe these soldiers' wives. If we housed them all in palaces, would that repay them for one unmarked grave "somewhere in France"? Yet there is a woman in Canada who will get up in public and say that "we are fostering extravagance and wastefulness" when we permit these lonely wives to seek the temporary anodyne of an hour's amusement, and that it is "disgraceful" that they will not act as charwomen for "women of brains." "Women of brains" may be the right description—certainly not "women of heart."

H.E. OR SHRAPNEL? — BETCHA!

WILLIAM PHILIP SIMMS, the U. P. man at Verdun, has a fine eye for colourful happenings, as this letter from a "bombproof shelter at Verdun" would indicate.

Outside the bombardment is going on, he says. The Germans are throwing some 250 shells a day into the city, most of the shells hitting in the business and residential districts, an average of one shell every four minutes. Some of the shells are incendiary, and the town is on fire at six or seven different points. The civil population gone, only a few cats and dogs are left behind to remind one that only a few weeks ago men and women and children sat by their firesides in this town and caressed their pets. It is lunch time. In the steam-heated corridors, 100 feet from the surface, the defenders of Verdun, off duty, are eating their noonday meal. There are long tables, with scores of men on either side, eating and talking contentedly. There is no excitement; only everybody seems interested. At the table of the general some twenty guests sit down. No better dinner could be had anywhere than this, served by the Blank Artillery Canteen, though it was part of the army commissary. Our bread was warm and delicious-smelling, fresh from the citadel's underground bakery. The lights we ate by, the water we drank, were from the citadel plants out of harm's way and independent of the city's supply.

Every man is born a gambler. Some succeed in subduing the instinct, others dabble now and then, tempting fickle fortune, while the rest are at it all the time, betting with death and the devil as to whether their souls will ultimately go up or down. I've just been told of a young soldier who belonged to the last-named class. He is badly wounded, and in a hospital not far from here, and they say he tries to bet with his nurse on his chances of recovery, he agreeing to take either end of the wager. Until he was mobilized eight months ago he was a young

AND OTHER STORIES

clerk at the Bourse, or, as the soldier who told the story put it, "he pushed a pencil on the Stock Exchange."

When he arrived at the front he brought his passion with him. He played bridge, seven-up poker,



UNSAFE.

Tuthill in the St. Louis Star.

checkers and chess; he "rolled the bones," pitched pennies, matched coins, gambled any and all sorts of ways. He would bet on anything, on the weather or the prospects of death or whether the next shell

over would be H. E. (High Explosive) or Shrapnel.

"My ration of spinach against yours that it rains to-day before four o'clock," he would say, apropos of nothing, any fine morning around grub-time. "Bet your section gets a grenade before mine does," he would offer in the trenches. And when a shell fell in the midst of a group of soldiers he would count those left standing, and instinctively cry out: "Even!" or "Odd!" as the case might be.

When the Germans began their smash against Verdun, the young Stock Exchange clerk found himself with a few others of his company in a very exposed advance-post. Shells fell around them, thick as hail, exploding and pitting the ground as you've seen rain pit the surface of a mill-pond.

"Let's bet on the calibres," he remarked to his friend at his left.

"All right," came the answer. "For how much?"

"A big sou on each."

"Bon!"

"The next in our section will be a 220," the clerk hazarded.

"I say it'll be a 350," the other said.

The shell came a 155 millimeter calibre; and the clerk cashed, he being nearest. And so it went on for ten minutes, the two exchanging big sous (pennies) after each explosion, withholding payment when in doubt, but doubling on the next. They were kept busy repairing, with pick and shovel, the damage done to their earthworks, but the betting continued just the same.

"Two-forty for the next!" sang out the pencil-pusher.

"A 305!" guessed the other.

Bang!

The shell threw dirt all over them both, so near had it fallen. A man in their section dropped like a shot.

"It was a 305! A 305!" yelled the winner, picking up and exhibiting the shell's timer, which by chance