"'V' IS FOR VISITOR!"

The Countess La Guerre Napoo at the Hospital.

It was visitors' day at the hospital, but owing to the fact that I was a new arrival and several thousand miles from home, I did not think it necessary to swathe myself in the extra bandages that are so essential to the success of visiting day. Imagine my surprise then when I observed the Captainess guiding an attractive lady of twenty-five or fifty to my dug-out. At first glance I thought the rum ration had arrived, but closer examination revealed the thing under her arm to be the ugliest bulldog it had ever been my misfortune to see, even with the assistance of vin rouge.

"Linesman Chalmers," whispered the Controller of good order and military discipline, "the Countess La Guerre Napoo has come to visit you. Tell her about your four years of undetected crime in the Army, but do not criticise Unpaid Lance Jack Sam Ross, for anything you say will be taken down, distorted, and used against you."

"Bon swear, mamselle," I frenchied. "May I offer you my pillow?"

"I spend a lot of my time cheering up our poor dear wounded boys," said my visitor. "My visits do them a lot of good. They all say that they will try to be as patriotic and unselfish as I am, and they are so anxious that I should lose no time in going to cheer up their friend. Our soldiers like dogs, so I always bring Cuthbert. He is a dinkum little pet. Shake hands with Mr. Chalmers, Cuthbert."

With my nerves at zero hour tension, I gingerly touched the ugly little beast's paw, but being a mere undistinguished private of the line, with no knowledge of instantaneous fuses, I took no liberties with this form of high explosive.

"What a dear little mongrel," I gurgled, 'does he like sweets?" (reaching for a number nine, which had been given me free gratis and for nothing, earlier in the year). "Good dog, Cuthbert," I chuckled, as I presented him with the toothsome morsel, which he received in his formidable looking phiz with a grunt of satisfaction.

"Oh! How good of you, my dear boy—he simply loves sweets."

"Very sorry that my stock is so limited," I observed quite truthfully, "just an odd one I had."

"I suppose you have been wounded?"

Thinking of a large piece of shrapnel which had been recently extracted from my leg under an anæsthetic, I replied, "A mere scratch—a lovely Blighty."

"Oh! I am glad it is not serious. I suppose you are anxious to get out again?"

"Rather. I am dying to get out again. Je ne pense pas!"

"Beg pardon?"

"Oh! The name of the place I was at, you know. Jenepensepas. A little place on the Somme."

"How were you wounded?"

"By the bursting of a dixie lid."

"A what?"

"Oh, a 15 inch, you know."

"A 15 inch?"

"Yes, a German shell."

"I see. Is that a large one?"

"Oh! no. A medium one."

"Really! I suppose their large shells must be very big?"

"They certainly are a fair size."

"Now, how big are they really, Mr. Chalmers?"

"Well, a few of them are a little larger than a locomotive boiler."

"Really! That is perhaps what they call a Jack Johnson?"

"Oh! no, a Jack Johnson is about the size of a gasometer."

"And these horrible shells burst?"

"Well, now and again they do, unfortunately."

"It must be horrible to get struck with one of these. Is it not?"

"Just a bit. You know one does not get struck very often with them."

"Oh! I am glad of that. You know I have three sons in the army. I feel quite proud of them."

"Naturally. What branch of the service are they in?"

"Well, Rene is in the A.S.C., Alex in the R.A.M.C., and George is on the staff."

"You must indeed be proud of them."

"They have been awfully lucky. They have been out for nearly a year now and have never been wounded, though they have had several very narrow escapes. Rene especially has a very dangerous job. He has to carry food up to the troops under heavy shell fire. Every day he has to drive his car from the Base to the Corps dump, while shells are bursting all around."

"Poor fellow. You must feel very anxious about him. Once I volunteered for a similar job."

"What a coincidence! Did you get it?"

"No. They said it was far too cushie for me."

"Indeed. Cushie?"

"Yes. Dangerous."

"Ah! You have, of course, the satisfaction of knowing that you volunteered for a hazardous enterprise. Perhaps it is just as well that you did not get it. You might have been killed."

"Yes, madam, I *might* have been, but I was, of course, prepared to take the risk."

"Alex also has a very trying time of it. He is in a Field Hospital, and is often as near as five miles to the front line. The Germans often fire rifle grenades at him, and he is continually under fire. George, I think however, has the most dangerous job of all. He has to spend most of his time in a nasty cellar at Corps Headquarters, advising the General, and planning attacks. It must be awful to live always in a cellar like that. His cellar is five hundred feet underground, and it took six months to build. Even there he is not at all safe, however, because only the week before George went out the Germans shelled the village and hit the Chateau which is only five minutes' walk from Corps Headquarters. He is very brave, however, and after the last attack he was awarded the D.S.O. for remaining at his post. But perhaps you have met my sons? They are in Flanders, you know."

"I am afraid I have never had the pleasure of meeting them, madam."

"No? George, I am sure, would be delighted to see you. I must get him to ask you to dinner with the General."

(Here I pictured myself offering woodbines to the General and discussing strategy with George.)

"Perhaps some day, Countess, I may come across your sons, but you know I have never been nearer the front than the firing line!"

"Really! But, as you say, some day, perhaps. Well, I must not excite you or you will not get better quickly, and you must get well soon, for I wish you to meet my husband, who is very busy on Government work of the utmost importance."

"How interesting."

"Yes, the Count makes keys for bully beef tins for the poor dear boys at the front. He is awfully keen about it and works very hard. Well, I must go now. Here is a book I have brought you to read. It is quite exciting—full of fighting and adventure. I am sure you will enjoy it. I hope you will be much better when I come next time."

"Thank you, so do I. Good-bye."

"Well, she is certainly doing her bit," I murmured as I turned over the leaves of —"The Pilgrim's Progress."

BACK TO "CIVVIES."

I could have wagged my wooden leg in a transport of gratitude. But four years of clicking, "sir-ring," saluting, and "having the honor to be" had driven naturalness and simplicity out of my system.

Four hundred a year! It was unbelievable, impossible! In a vision I saw my wife's elated expression and the look of tender thankfulness on her face; and I made a mental list of the things—the necessary things, including a baby-chair—that I would buy for our little Nigel when all this money came rolling in.

The merchant who was interviewing me must have divined the effort I was making to avoid becoming hysterical, for he endeavoured to reassure me.

"That's all right," he said breezily. "We know what we're about. We're giving you £400 a year because we consider you're worth it. You'll be worth still more to us in a year's time. It doesn't matter to us what you earned before the war. You've been soldiering hard for nearly four years and there's not likely to be much lacking in you now.

"I believe in soldiers. I'm honoured when they come to me. And I know that, as an officer, you'll be loyal to your principals as you'll be just and capable in handling your subordinates. What all business men want, if they only knew it, is soldiers, soldiers, soldiers all the time. Punctuality, sir. Conscientiousness. Quickness of decision. Initiative. Capacity for control. Smartness. Plenty of work and the minimum of talk. I'm glad to have you, sir."

Falteringly I thanked him. "You see, sir," I said, "I've no fear of not earning the money, really. I know I'll earn it. But, to tell you the truth, I didn't expect to get so much. I had an idea that on coming back to civilian life people would take into account the small pension I got—for this. . . . ." I indicated my artificial leg.

"Pension!" snorted my employer. "I hope if ever I stoop to question a man about his pension with a view to reducing his salary I would otherwise pay him—I hope, sir, if that ever happens, that these walls"—he waved his arms to embrace the whole building —"and this business may crash and crumble about my ears."

I thanked him again, monosyllabically.

"I'm glad to have you," he reiterated. "your salary starts from to-day. But there's no need to begin till—let me see—a fortnight from now."

The merchant shook my hand and saw me to the lift. And I, thinking how war had refined and purified every branch of our national life, and how it had ennobled our people, hurried home with the glad tidings to an anxious wife and mother.

And then, writes Uni-Ped—I am not trying to be funny; it breaks my heart to say it—I woke up.

This is the dream. But if Canadian employers carry out their part of the contract it will come nearly if not quite true.