

THE COLONEL'S MONOLOGUE

SCENTED trouble. It immediately occurred to me that just so soon as Mrs. Col. Selwyn Jones read that heading in the morning paper, to say nothing of the impassioned appeal that followed (written, I suppose, by a young cub of a reporter who never eats the bally things), she'd rise to the needs of the situation. At least she'd see that I rose.

I stroll into the garden to calm my fears.

The indignities I have suffered since this war started is unbelievable. Why couldn't the War Office have done as I requested and instructed me to take charge of a company of men for Home Defence, or something not quite as beastly menial as the jobs that have been allotted to me by my wife. What would Sir Montague Woodstone have thought—Monty always is so beastly aristocratic—could he have seen me—peddling, I think they call it, tickets for Red Cross Raffles, taking the money at Patriotic Concerts and having disputes with most illiterate people over their change, as well as pouring tea at little gatherings of my wife's, where I've been the only male present. "More sugar, Mrs. So-and-So?" "No, thank you, Colonel. I'm sweet enough already," and all that sort of bosh from a lot of would-be grand-daughters, instead of acting as the most of them really are, grandmothers. It all seems so embarrassingly foolish to a retired Colonel from the British Army with lots of fight in him yet. And yet, mind you, I notice that Sir Monty says, in his last letter, that he was looking after his own garden in order that his man might go to the front. And I do believe—let me see—yes, he says Lady Woodstone is doing her own cooking. Poor Lady Woodstone, yes, and poor Monty.

I am 72 years of age, I would have you know, and when Mrs. Col. Selwyn Jones imagines that I, her husband, am as young and active as she herself was when she was one-half the age that, with proper care I should live to, it simply means that I shall not live to the age that I was apparently intended. By Gad, there's a conundrum for you.

"Mrs. Jones wishes to speak to you, sir," says the Chinaman, in broken English.

I follow him inside. No need to chronicle the discussion. It would only make my humiliation more complete. My heart nearly stopped as I saw her with paper in hand awaiting me. It was over before she started. I could tell by the firmness of her mouth that she had decided and I, I, who have commanded a regiment of the finest men that ever stepped into uniform, men who would have died, by Gad, willingly died sooner than surrender. I, Colonel Selwyn Jones, K.C.B., knew that once more I was outgeneralled, or in my own particular case, outcolonelled, by a woman, a mere woman, and merely a woman.

AND here I am. My instructions are to dig the back garden, and if this is not sufficient in her estimation, I am to tear up the front lawn.

The back garden will be sufficient. I have not said so in so many words, but I mean it.

Dig up the front lawn. Yes, and mix manure with it, the beastly stuff. And when I want my afternoon nap in the sun, where am I to go. Have my chair between two rows of potatoes, with the plants tickling my feet and the sweet aroma of the fertilizing earth wafting around me. To use a phrase of my neighbour Chalmers—of whom I am not over fond—"Nothing doin', sir." By George. Nothing doing. I should say not. The idea.

There is a little truth in the words of one of those infernal poets, "Misery loves company," for I feel a little gratification in noticing that Chalmers is also engaged on the same kind of work.

"Hello, Jones," says he, as I approach, shovel and pick in hand.

Do you know, before I came to Victoria, British

"Potatoes will be badly needed. Citizens requested to help by Cultivating their Spare Ground"—News Item

By ERNEST J. DOWN



Illustrated by F. C. Holden

Columbia, I was never called anything but Colonel, save by a few of my most intimate and regular Club pals who might address me as Selwyn, without causing offence. This Western atmosphere is abominably familiar, and to hear Chalmers—Chalmers of all people—who is, I believe, a retired farmer from the prairies or some other old place where they grow corn or something—address me as plain, commonplace Jones, is most humiliating. I always glance over my shoulder when he speaks to me in this strain, to see whether the McTaggarts or the St. Aubyns—very well brought up people—are about.

"Good morning" is my only reply as I stoop to my allotted task.

I had been digging most assiduously for quite a while, when the beastly pick came off the handle and struck me just below the right knee. By Gad, it hurt. I had one of those bally spears stuck in my left shoulder in the Zulu war, but the pain didn't seem anything compared with this. I must have articulated slightly—possibly swore—I can't remember, at any rate Chalmers looked up from his work.

"Did you hit yourself?" said he, with a pleasant smile.

"Did you hit yourself." The idea. The silly ass. "No. I'm practising a new dance," said I, thoroughly roused.

"Perhaps the handle was loose," said Chalmers, looking down at the pick and handle lying side by side.

"Perhaps it's an old one," he added, as I refused to reply to his sarcasm.

"And perhaps you'll mind your own infernal business, sir," said I, rather rudely, I am afraid. But really it was aggravating. And as we are the best of pals now, I don't mind admitting that I was rude.

It must have been two hours later (half an hour of which I spent recovering my bally eye-glass, which I eventually found had got twisted round the back of my neck) and I had dug quite a nice little square, when I received an awful whack on the head with a huge clod of earth.

I looked up, enraged at Chalmers.

He, however, was digging away quite unconcernedly.

A few minutes later, would you believe it, another clod of the beastly stuff struck me right in the same place, and shortly after another. This indignity could not be tolerated any longer. It required action. I remembered the old military rule, the best defence is attack.

Chalmers was humming a little song, but from the backview I obtained of him there seemed something suspicious of mirth in his general appearance. Selecting the biggest clod I could find I slowly

walked over to the dividing fence and hurled it with all my might. With such true and unerring aim that would have been considered a good shot way back in the days when I was the best throw in from long field in the College Cricket Team, it hit Chalmers square in the back of the neck. He jumped to his feet seemingly indignant.

No sooner had I thrown it, however, believe me or believe me not (if you are a gentleman you will), I heard a scampering of feet mingled with low chuckles of glee from outside the high board fence surrounding my lot. The thought occurred to me, What if those beastly clods had been thrown at me by some of those mischievous school children who are always hanging around the place.

Chalmers walked over the front line trenches to the barbed wire entanglements. "What's the game?" said he.

"I want to know, sir," said I. "Did you throw three large clods of this beastly earth at me on three distinct and separate occasions?"

"No, sir; I did not."

I believed him. Who wouldn't. He was much younger than I, quite an athletic-looking chap, in fact. Of course this wouldn't have troubled me one jot, were I convinced that I was right. But I had the growing conviction that my latter suspicions were correct.

"I'm very sorry, Chalmers," said I. It cost me a lot to say that. There are very few retired Colonels from the British Army that care to apologize. To say the least, it hurt considerably. I even allowed him to call me Jones without protest, and took one of his beastly little cigarettes to show I was really sorry. By Gad, it was awful.

ON the afternoon of the third day I had finished. Feeling most uncomfortably tired, I ambled inside the house. There was Mrs. Col. Selwyn Jones waiting for me. She kissed me as I entered.

Although she's very, very fond of me, it is not usual for her to bestow any mark of affection on me at the ungodly hour of four in the afternoon, and I immediately became suspicious.

"Mrs. Johnson has just rung up, dear," said she. "She's been loaned two acres of vacant ground and intends to have it cultivated for the benefit of the Friendly Help Society, and I told her we would be quite willing to—"

"What does she intend to have planted there?" said I, rather sternly, I must admit.

"Just potatoes, dear. She said she was relying on us—"

"US?"

"Yes, dear, US."

"The S is off, my dear," I replied. "The U remains. If U can help her I see no objection to your doing so, but, so far as I am concerned, I absolutely refuse to shorten my life by digging any more potatoes. I'll be making fertilizer myself for potatoes and other noxious weeds if I don't take care. And then you'll be sorry. Or at least you should be."

With this I slammed the door and walked into the bath-room. But to-morrow I know what is in store for me.

THE author of the book, *How Armies Fight*, recommended as a text book for Canadian officers, says:

At one time a battalion was considered to be the right number of men for one officer to lead and control in battle. That was in the days when infantry fought in solid masses, the men in each line shoulder to shoulder; consequently a battalion did not extend over very much ground.

A solid mass of men, however, makes a very fine target for an enemy, so that modern rifles and field-guns, which can be fired far quicker and at a much greater distance than the old ones, would mow down the ranks as a reaping machine cuts corn. So it is generally reckoned nowadays that a company of one hundred men is the greatest force which one officer—its captain—can handle in action.