

THE NEW OFFICER

“THE officer,” said Private Smithy, of the 1st Anchesters, “is a new officer. It isn’t the new kind of uniform, or the new Salvation Army cap, or the new silly way of wearing his shoulder sash. He’s a changed officer, if you understand. He don’t look no different, and in many ways he’s not altered a bit. He still plays polo and bridge—— What’s bridge?”

I explained.

“Well, he still does all these things just about as much as ever he did, but I tell you ’e’s an astounding blighter in many ways.

“It ain’t so long ago,” reflected this ornament of the First Army Corps, “when officers used to come on parade at 10 a.m.—commanding officers’ parade, drill order—and we used to look at ’em

hard to discover whether we'd seen 'em before. They used to troop down from the officers' mess buttoning up their brown gloves and hooking on their swords under their patrol jackets. They'd stand about for a minute or two yawnin' their blankey 'eads orf an' then the bugle'd sound, 'Officers come and be blowed,' an' they'd fall in.

"Well, the colour-sergeant was always waitin' for 'em.

"'What's on this mornin',' says my fine captain.

"'Battalion drill, sir,' says the flag.

"'Oh, dash battalion drill,' sez the captain, walkin' round and inspectin' the company. 'Take this man's name, colour-sergeant, for wearin' his pouch on the right side.'

"'Beg pardon, sir,' sez the flag, 'they're wore on the right side.'

"'So they are,' sez the intelligent

captain, givin' a casual glance along the line. 'Well, take his name for 'avin' a dirty belt.'

" 'Right, sir,' sez the colour-sergeant.

"When the inspection was over the officer would draw his sword and read the writin' on it, and draw noughts and crosses with it on the ground; then fall in six paces ahead of the centre of his company. Bimeby he'd see something 'appening to the company ahead of his.

" 'What's goin' on there, colour-sergeant?' he'd ask.

" 'Formin' fours, sir,' sez the colour-sergeant.

" 'Oh, I forgot all about that,' sez his nibs. 'Company! Fóm fours!' an' not a man moves.

" 'You 'aven't numbered 'em, sir,' sez the colour-sergeant.

" 'Hey?' sez the captain, gettin' red. 'Then why the dickens ain't they

numbered when they fall in? Number off from the right, an' be quick about it.'

"Then comes the battalion drill," continued Smithy, with a sad, reminiscent smile. "The Colonel shouts something.

"'What's that he said, colour-sergeant?' sez the officer.

"'Into line, right form, sir,' sez the flag.

"'What do I do?' sez the captain.

"'Turn half-right, sir, and wait for the word "march,"' whispers the flag.

"And right through the drill it was the same. Sometimes the captain was right, sometimes he was wrong. Sometimes he had the whole company jumbled up in horrid confusion, and the Colonel would come prancing along and say things he was probably sorry for afterwards.

"Well, an hour of this sort of thing went on, and then it was 'Right turn—Dismiss,' and the officer would run away and change his sword an' uniform for a

Sunday suit an' a panamar hat, and we didn't see him again till to-morrow."

Smithy raised himself on his elbow and addressed the orderly man staggering tentward with a big kettle of steaming tea.

Would the orderly man be so kind as to give Smithy a basin of tea and save him the trouble of coming to the tent for it? Without checking his career, the orderly man remarked, "Oh, yes, why not? not 'arf. Would Smithy like him (the orderly man) to drink it for him (Smithy)? Did he want waiting on? Should he fetch it in a feeding bottle?" and sundry other ejaculations of a bitterly satirical character.

Whereupon Smithy, realizing that the enemy was rapidly getting out of range, delivered a rapid feu de joie of personalities, calculated to annoy and distress a young and ambitious orderly man.

"'Pon my word," said Smithy

gloomily, "these blanked Brodericks are gettin' worse an' worse; the men 'ave changed as much as the officers."

"How 'ave the officers changed?" I asked.

"I was going to tell you," said Smithy. "As I said before, it's only an inward change. You know soldiers, don't you?"

"I do."

"Well, you've seen Tommy get converted—get religion, haven't you? He drops the wet canteen, and spends his time in the library playin' bagatelle with other bun-wallahs. The cloth is always torn, and the cues 'ave no tips," added Smithy inconsequently. "He goes to chapel on week nights and shows up the regiment by prayin' in public; joins the Templars with fancy grips and passwords and sashes. Well, beyond giving up booze and saying 'confound' instead of '——' or '——' or '——' there

ain't much difference, outwardly at least. He still parts his hair ; he still mashes the girls ; he still does all things 'uman—except swear and drink.

" So it is with the officer—'e's changed inwardly. He plays polo and golf—which is a rotten game in my opinion—and motors.

" But somehow we seem to see more of him than we used.

" He comes nosing around at all hours of the day. He does colour-sergeant's work and corporals' work—in fact, he knows as much about soldiering now as we do. He doesn't make mistakes on parade ; he turns up at the rifle range even when it ain't his turn for duty ; he'll take a dozen chaps out into the country and teach them how to sketch ; he spends a lot of his spare time learning flag-wagging—in fact, in fact," said Smithy, struggling for a climax, " he's a more astoundin' blighter than ever."

Smithy refilled and relit his pipe and thought for some moments. "Yesterday," said he, "old French had us out attackin' or defendin'—I don't know which—a bit of a village, over there." Smithy pointed vaguely. "I was with a half company under Mr. Brick-Taylor—he gets his company next month. We g'ot a new colour-sergeant from the second battalion who's been used to giving officers tips all his life.

"We were scoutin' ahead, and we sighted the enemy outside a pub. near Frinham. We could see them, they couldn't see us.

" 'Get into that donga,' sez the officer, pointin' to a big deep ditch.

" 'Beg pardon, sir,' says the flag, 'I think you ought to extend the men and retire, sir.'

" 'Oh, you do, do you?' sez the officer, 'well, I don't; get into the donga as quick as you can.'

" 'Beg pardon, sir,' sez the flag, 'but the book sez——'

" 'What book?' sez the orficer.

" 'Drill book, sir,' sez the colour-bloke.

" 'Never read it,' sez the 'little man' as calm as you please. 'I'm takin' cover and hidin', because I once got plugged in the neck by a Mauser bullet for not doin' so. I am not retiring in open order accordin' to the book, because I tried something like it at Magersfontein and appeared in all the London papers the next mornin' as 'dangerously.'"

A bugle call rang out sharp and clear, a dozen tents disgorged one or two men, who buttoned their coats as they hurried to the guard tent.

"Defaulters," said Smithy, shifting his position to one of greater comfort; "all young soldiers; an' punishment's good for 'em—it's surprisin' how a few kicks help a man in the Army."

THE AGITATOR

“HEARD about our secret society?” asked Smithy.

I assured him that I had not heard the faintest whisper of anything so alarming.

Smithy laughed, as though he had suddenly remembered something amusing.

“Chap named Oats—Shaker Oats we call him—got nine months’ service, an’ to hear him talk you’d a-thought he was born in Buckin’ham Palace, the side he put on.

“He blew into the Army when no one was lookin’, and he was so surprised to find hisself in airproof clothes an’ boots that didn’t let in the showery weather that he began to swell; and when he’d got used to not feelin’ hungry he began to let on about the way the pore soldier was treated, an’ how civilians thought

soldiers was dogs, an' how we was defendin' the Empire for a shillin' a day whilst bits of putty-faced boys earnin' a pound a week was walkin' out our girls.

"One day Nobby comes to me an' sez, 'Where's Oatsey?'

"'Defendin' the Empire,' I sez, 'by learnin' which end of the rifle the bang comes from'—for Oatsey about that time was doin' his recruit's course of musketry.

"'Heard about the secret society?' sez Nobby.

"'Good Templars?' I sez.

"'No, Oatsey's,' sez Nobby.

"It appears that Oatsey got a lot of chaps together in the wet canteen an' told 'em he was goin' to form a secret society called 'The Pore Soldiers' Anti-Slavery League.' The chaps wouldn't listen to him at first, but he paid for a pint all round an' told 'em all about it.

"The news that Oatsey was havin' a