

## MISSING WORDS

MANY years ago a popular periodical offered a pound a week for life as a prize for the solution of a problem.

It is one of the glorious traditions of the British Army that this prize went to a soldier.

Since when, as Smithy pointed out, newspaper competitions have enjoyed considerable popularity in the junior service.

I am inclined to agree with my military friend that sufficient attention has not been paid to the soldier in the matter of competitions, and although, as I am willing to admit, there were points about Private Clark's venture which border perilously close upon the illegal, not to

say criminal, I share Smithy's admiration for the genius of the inventor.

"A chap named Macpherson—the chap that said 'e was as good as the Colonel if 'e'd bin born in diff'rent circumstances—won a prize from the *Anchester Guardian*," said Smithy. "We all went in for it, me an' Nobby Clark, Spud Murphy, 'Appy Johnson, Dusty Miller—oh, an' a lot of us.

"The competition was to fill in a word at the end of a line. It went some'ow like this:—

"The British soldier is renowned all the world over for his pluck. On the march nothin' is so remarkable as his tremendous——

"You 'ad to fill in a bit of paper with the last word that wasn't there, and send it in.

"I put 'weariness,' Spud put 'grousin','

Dusty Miller put 'stiffness,' 'Appy Johnson got a word out of the dictionary, 'acumen,' another chap in 'H' put 'thirst,' an' Nobby sent two papers—they cost a penny each too—one with 'feet,' an' the other with 'corns.'

"It appears that old Mac sent in 'endurance,' an' got the prize, an' Nobby was very wild, an' said it wasn't fair to use words that wasn't in the dictionary.

"'E got more friendly towards night, though, an' when old Mac come into the canteen for 'is supper beer Nobby walks up to 'im an' shakes 'ands.

" ' Good luck to you, Mac,' sez Nobby, ' I'm very glad it's you that's got it,' 'e sez ; ' if it'd been anybody else they wouldn't 'ave offered to share all round, share an' share alike.'

" ' No more don't I,' sez Mac, short an' sweet.

" ' Don't say that, Mac,' sez Nobby,

very hurt; 'don't say that, an' you a Socialist, too.'

" 'I ain't a Socialist when I've got any money,' sez Mac; 'it's only poverty that makes men Socialists.'

" 'Ain't you goin' to share, you long-  
'aired Anarchist?' sez Nobby.

" 'No,' sez Mac, 'I ain't.'

" Old Nobby thought a bit. 'Well, don't,' 'e sez, an' something else.

" 'Go there yourself,' sez Mac.

" Next mornin' after the eleven o'clock parade Nobby comes to me an' sez :—

" 'Comin' in my competition, Smithy?'

" 'Wot competition?' I sez.

" 'A new one I've got up for the troops,' 'e sez, an', sure enough, 'e wasn't jokin', for it was all over barracks that Nobby was offerin' two quid to anybody who answered a question what he writ on a bit of paper in the canteen.

"This was the competition. Nobby put down this on a paper :

" 'NOTICE

" 'I have writ down two words, an' the first chap who comes up to me and gives me sixpence an' say them will have two pounds.'

"Of course, nobody believed old Nobby, but 'e showed 'em the two sovereigns an' the paper with the words on, all sealed up with sealin'-wax, an' by and by Weary Walker, of 'G,' sez, 'Well, I'll 'ave sixpennorth. 'Ere's your tanner, Nobby—is it "Good-mornin' " '?"

" 'No,' sez Nobby, prompt.

"So then Tiny White spent sixpence, an' said: 'Wot, Nobby!' But Nobby shook 'is 'ead an' bought a pint of beer with the money.

"Chaps come from every company to try their luck. Some said, 'Nice day ;'

some said, 'How's things?' some said 'Buck up,' but Nobby only shook 'is 'ead an' took the money.

"Our corporal got fed up with people always rushin' into our barrack-room just as we were going to 'ave dinner.

" 'I've got it, Nobby,' they'd say, tremblin' with excitement.

" 'Give us your money first,' sez Nobby; an' they'd part like birds.

" 'It's "Shoulder arms"' they'd say, or 'Mark time,' or 'Form fours,' an' 'old out their mits for the two pounds.

" 'Wrong,' sez Nobby sadly, an' they'd go away quite disappointed.

"One day our corporal, 'Pidgin' Partridge, the chap with the funny face, said, 'Look here, Clark, if any more of them corner boys of 'H' come running in at dinner-time, I'll say two words. 'Guard room,' they'll be, an' don't you forget it.'

" Well, it got about somehow that the two words Nobby put down was what you'd call a chap who dropped a rifle on your toe, or breathed on your buttons, or put an oil rag on your white belt, an' for three days the troops used to come up to Nobby, pay 'im sixpence, an' swear at him.

" One night when Nobby was out in town, old Tom Coke of 'G' comes runnin' into my barrack-room.

" 'Where's Nobby?' 'e sez.

" 'Down town,' I sez.

" 'I've thought of the two words,' 'e sez, all in a twitter. 'Where can I find 'im?'

" 'Down at the theatre seein' *The Gallant Soldier Lad.*'

" 'In the gallery or in the pit?' 'e sez.

" 'In the private boxes, fat 'ed,' I sez, and 'e runs out.

" It appears Nobby was sittin' in the

front row of the gallery, when old Cokey come in an' spotted 'im.

"They'd just got to the part on the stage where the villain was smokin' a cigarette an' tellin' the 'ero that 'e was only a common soldier, an' all the girls in the audience was snivellin', and all the chaps was blowin' their noses, when Cokey shouts :

" ' Nobby ! ' "

" Nobby looks round, an' so did the audience.

" ' Catch this tanner, Nobby, ' an' Cokey threw a sixpence.

" Nobby ' adn't got the face to catch it, so it fell on the ' ead of a young militia officer in the stalls.

" ' Turn ' im out ! ' shouts everybody, an' the villain on the stage lit another cigarette.

" ' It's blank, blank ! ' shouts Cokey, strugglin' with a chucker-out.



" Well, the end of it was that old Cokey got seven days for usin' horrible language in a public theatre and creatin' a disturbance.

" Then it got about that the two words was what you'd say to a chap if you wanted to stand treat, an' 'arf a dozen fellers paid sixpence to say, 'Drink up,' 'Ave another' an' 'What's yours?' but Nobby always said 'Beer,' an' took their six-pences.

" They got fed up after a bit : Nobby 'ad collected thirty-seven an' six, an' nobody managed to guess the words.

" 'Let's see that paper, Nobby,' sez Spud Murphy one night ; 'we're tired of payin' you tanners, and we're goin' to give the riddle up. What's the words?'

" Nobby looked at me an' sort of considered.

" 'I'll give you all another chance,' 'e sez, 'at 'arf price.'

“ But there was no takers.

“ ‘ Let’s see the paper, Nobby,’ sez Mac, who’d spent two an’ six on five guesses.

“ ‘ What paper?’ sez Nobby.

“ ‘ The paper them words are on,’ sez Spud.

“ Nobby thought a bit, then took the paper from ’is pocket an’ broke the sealin’-wax.

“ All the chaps crowded round when Nobby opened the paper, an’ looked over ’is shoulder.

“ ‘ Why, there’s nothin’ written on it at all!’ sez Spud Murphy, very indignant.

“ Nobby looked surprised.

“ ‘ I must ’ave forgotten to put ’em down,’ ’e sez.

“ ‘ ‘Ere, Smithy, lend us a bit of pencil, an’ I’ll put ’em down now,’ ’e sez.”