

THE JOURNALIST

I MET Smithy in the High Street, and I will not attempt to deny that Smithy did not seem the least bit pleased to see me. He was in uniform, hence I conjectured that he had lost his job as groom to Major-Somebody-or-Other on the Staff.

“Fact is,” confessed Smithy, in answer to my reproaches, “I’m a bit down on newspaper chaps just now.”

This was indeed mournful news.

From the day I had first met Private Smithy, of the 1st Ancaster Regiment, at Orange River Station, when he gave a memorable reproof to the haughty C.I.V., down, so to speak, to yesterday, Smithy’s regard and esteem for the members of my profession had been most flattering.

“It’s hard enough,” complained

Smithy, bitterly, " when they won't put your bits in the paper ; but when they do, and, what's more," he added, with rising wrath, " they put your blue-light name to it why—why, it's emphatically, unprintably hard ! "

And Smithy relapsed into a moody silence.

" Nobby Clark sez to me," he resumed, plunging into the thick of his grievance, "'e sez, ' Smithy, how much money've you got ? '

" ' Four dee,' I sez—and it was three days off pay-day," added Smithy, in vindication of his penury.

" ' Go and borry a couple of bob from the flag,' he sez.

" ' You go,' I sez.

" ' I've been,' he sez sadly.

" ' So 'ave I,' I sez.

" ' What did 'e say ? ' sez Nobby, an' I told him.

“ You wouldn’t think a man with a colour-sergeant’s rank would use such language, would you ? ” asked Smithy, who gave me verbatim the “ flag’s ” insulting reply to Smithy’s modest demands.

“ ‘ Well,’ sez Nobby, ‘ we must git some money somewhere ; what about puttin’ a bit in the papers ? ’ ”

“ ‘ What shall we put ? ’ I sez, catchin’ on to the idea, for a chap I know—Fatty James, of ‘ B ’ Company—got ten shillings on’ce for writin’ to a paper that a picture of a sheep and a fence meant ‘ Rams-gate.’ ”

“ ‘ Make something up,’ sez Nobby ; so me an’ ’im went over to the library an’ thought an’ thought an’ thought.”

Smithy lowered his voice to a reverential huskiness at the recollection of that evening of tremendous mental exertion.

"After about two hours," he resumed, thoughtfully, "we made up a piece."

He stopped beneath a street lamp, and produced a soiled half-sheet of notepaper, bearing the regimental crest:

"I copied it," he said simply, and I read :

"We are give to understand upon the highest unimpechible authority that a severe muttiny broke out in the barracks of the Ancaster Regiment on Friday last at 10 o'clock oweing to the uppish conduct of a certain colour-sargent of B Company trying to come the old soldier over the gallant heros of that famous regiment. We think this should be put a stop to at once as much bloodshed would not take place if certain parties knew where to draw the line."

I handed the paper back to Smithy.

“What do you think of that?” he asked anxiously.

I gave it my unqualified approval.

“Well,” resumed the sensationalist, “we sent it to the *Ancaster Gazette*, an’ they put a bit of it in, an’ sends me half a james.”

Which, to be exact, is ten shillings, a handsome reward, considering the *Gazette* had evidently omitted the more startling portion of the news.

“So me and Nobby writes another bit,” Smithy went on—“’ere it is.”

A second soiled fragment of history was produced :

“We hear from two who knows that another horrible muttyny came off at the barracks of the *Ancaster Regiment* yesterday at 1.35, oweing to a certain party being a bit too clever and talking big in the canteen about his rich relations.”

"That," explained Smithy hastily, "was a party named Briggs, who's got an uncle in the linendrapin' line."

"Did they print that?" I asked.

"No," said Smithy, with a cough. "I got a letter from the head man: 'Dear sir, we're tired of mutinies; try us with something else.'"

Smithy had the sarcastic message by heart.

"So we did," he went on gloomily; "so we did. Nobby an' me, we thought an' thought for two days."

"'Let's say there was a horrible fire in barracks,' he sez.

"'No,' I sez, 'let's say there was a horrible suicide in "B" Company,' I sez.

"'No,' sez Nobby, who's got a down on 'D' owin' to the company cook an' him being bad friends, 'let's say "D" Company has been horribly poisoned to

death owin' to the way the meat's cooked !'

" Well," said Smithy, with a sigh, " we thought of everything, from a horrible discovery in the officers' quarters to the quartermaster-sergeant doin' a horrible bunk with the pay, till at last old Nobby says, ' I've got it !'

" I've got it," repeated Smithy, with a groan.

" ' Is it a horrible ?' I sez.

" ' No,' sez Nobby, ' it ain't ; it's Fanny,' he sez.

" ' Oh !' I sez. ' Is it a horrible murder of the Colonel's daughter ?' I sez—we call her Fanny," Smithy explained.

" ' She's a nice girl,' sez Nobby, sort of musin'.

" ' I've never noticed it,' I sez.

" ' She ought to be married,' sez Nobby. ' Let's marry 'er to some one.'

" So me an' Nobby sat up half the night

tryin' to think who we could marry her to. He started with the doctor, who got Nobby seven days for shammin' tooth-ache, and then we thought of 'the Adjutant, who's always on my collar; but bimeby we said let bygorns be bygorns, an' we married her to the General."

I gasped, for General Stucker, blank old Stucker as he is nicknamed, because of the choice and variety of his expletives, is the most peppery old warrior in the British Army.

"We married her to the General," and Smithy's native sense of humour was responsible for the faint chuckle he gave. "Here—read this."

Another friendly lamp-post obliged.

"We beg to announce with much pleasure that Miss Fanny Gollingham our colonels daughter is walking out with General Stucker whose heroic

conduct is greatly admired and the happy couple will soon leave on their honeymoon. We hope kind friends will rally round they being the first to help others."

"Did they print that?" I asked in an awestruck whisper.

"They did," said Smithy in a pained undertone.

"Well?" I asked.

"It was Nobby Clark who done it," said Smithy explosively; "he sez, 'Let's sign it "Captain Clark of 'B,'" and "Major Smith of 'H,'" for a lark.'

"'Where's the lark?' I sez.

"'Why, fathead,' he sez, 'they won't put it in unless they think we know all about it,' he sez; so we signed it."

Smithy drew a crumpled newspaper cutting from his pocket:

"We are happy, on the authority

of Major Smith, of H Company, and Captain Clark, of B, to announce the engagement of Major-General Sir George Stucker, K.C.B., to the eldest daughter of Lieut.-Colonel Gollingham. The wedding will be celebrated at an early date, and Major Smith is to be best man."

I handed the cutting back.

"Major Smith best man!" I murmured, in amazement. "So that's why you lost your job?"

"Yes," said Smithy bitterly; "Nobby put that bit in when I wasn't lookin'!"