

BACK TO CIVIL LIFE

“ It’s only nacheral,” said Smithy, “ that a feller that’s been doin’ nothin’ for a livin’ for seven years gits the idea into his ’ead that as soon as ’e’s out of the Army ’e can go on doin’ nothin’ an’ live comfortable.

“ A chap generally enlists because ’e’s very hard up, or there ain’t no work to be got. If you understand me rightly, a chap’s pushed into the Army by the crowd of out-of-works behind him, an’ by the time ’e’s got his breath, an’ is full up with Army rations, an’ finds ’e’s got plenty of elbow room, ’e begins to forget all about the crowd outside, an’ when his seven years’ service is nearly in ’e begins to fancy that ’e really enlisted

for the love of the thing, an' not because 'e was feelin' peckish.

"Then the Colonel sends for 'im.

"'Ah, 'Thompson,' sez the Colonel 'artily, 'I understand you're goin' away on the reserve?'

"'Yes, sir,' sez Thompson.

"'Do you think that's wise?' sez the Colonel.

"'Ho, yes,' sez the clever chap cockily.

"'It's very 'ard in civilian life just now,' sez the Colonel. 'What are you goin' to do for a livin'?'

"'Anything,' sez the clever chap, prompt.

"'Hump!' sez the Colonel; 'that means "nothing"—are you sure you won't sign on for another five years?'

"'I'll watch it,' sez the clever chap.

"So he goes away in a pair of loud check trousis an' a Trilby 'at an' a tup-peny cigar, to show 'is independence.

"'E gits up to London, goes 'ome to see his people, 'as a couple of drinks, goes to a music-'all, an' spends a sovereign as free as you please. For a week 'e's as 'appy as a king. Gits up what time he likes, an' don't shave unless 'e wants to.

"'E's got no sergeants an' corporals to bully 'im, no officers to salute, no fatigues, an' no drills, an' when 'e goes out in town 'e needn't look clean unless 'e feels inclined.

"After a week of riotous livin', most of 'is money bein' spent, 'e pops off to look for work in 'is loud check trousers with the beer stains, an' 'is Trilby 'at a bit out of shape.

"'Want a job, do you?' sez the chap where 'e goes to. 'What can you do?'

"'Anything,' sez the clever chap.

"'Outside,' sez the chap at the works. 'We don't want "anything" fellers here.'

“ ‘What’s your last job?’ sez another feller ’e applies to.

“ ‘Army,’ sez the clever chap, producin’ ’is discharge.

“ ‘What can you do?’ sez the foreman.

“ ‘The clever chap’s learnt a lesson, so ’e’s a bit cautious.

“ ‘Messenger,’ ’e sez.

“ ‘We’ve got boys for messengers,’ sez the foreman.

“ ‘Timekeeper,’ sez the clever chap.

“ ‘We’ve got a clock for that.’

“ ‘Caretaker,’ sez the clever chap.

“ ‘We don’t want no sleepin’ partners,’ sez the foreman.

“ ‘Well,’ sez the clever chap desperate, ‘hall porter.’

“ ‘We ain’t got a hall,’ sez the foreman.

“ ‘What some of these clever jossers want,’ said Smithy scornfully, “is a job where there ain’t any work to do—jobs you can lay down an’ watch; old

men's jobs, boys' jobs, jobs that don't blister a chap's 'ands, an' that's why all the bloomin' Soldiers' Help Associations in the world won't do any good, because there ain't enough of them jobs to go round.

"The other day Spud Murphy gave it out that as soon as his seven years was in he was going to leave.

"He was talkin' to me an' Nobby about it.

"'No more bloomin' soldierin' for me, thank you,' sez Spud.

"'Don't thank me,' sez Nobby.

"'I'm goin' to be a free man,' sez Spud, 'like I was before I enlisted.'

"'Ah!' sez Nobby, lookin' up to the sky with a smile.

"'When you chaps are bein' turned out of bed at six in the mornin' I shall be gettin' my eye down nice an' snug.'

"'Ah!' sez Nobby.

“ ‘No more church parades, no more kit inspections, no more bloomin’ guards,’ sez Spud.

“ ‘No,’ sez Nobby, getting up—we was sittin’ on the grass in the cricket field—‘No,’ sez Nobby sadly. ‘You’ll be a free man, free to get your livin’ or starve. There won’t be no kit inspections, ’kos you’ll ’ave no kit to show, nor no guards either, becos’ nobody would trust you to guard a threepenny bit. Pore feller,’ sez Nobby, shaking his ’ead an’ lookin’ at Spud, ‘pore old Spud.’

“ ‘Spud ain’t goin’ away,’” Smithy went on to explain, “because Nobby put it about in barracks that ’e was only leavin’ the Army because the doctor wouldn’t pass him for an extension of service, an’ just to show Nobby was a liar, Spud went an’ took on for another five years.

“ ‘If you understand,’” said Smithy earnestly, “it ain’t the chap’s fault that

he can't get a job when he leaves the service, it's the Army's. A chap that 'as to leave civil life because he ain't got a trade in his 'ands can't expect to go back to civil life an' find a job sittin' up on its 'ind legs an' beggin'.

"The Army don't teach him nothin'," continued Smithy seriously, "except to turn about by numbers, an' not to talk back to his superiors, an' that's not much use for civil life.

"When his time's up he goes out an' asks Civil Life to find him work.

"'What can you do?' sez Civil Life.

"'Stand erect, with me feet at an angle of forty-five degrees, 'ead up, shoulders back, an' me 'ands 'ung loosely by me side, thumbs in rear of the seams of me trousis,' sez the Army.

"'Very sorry,' sez Civil Life, 'but we 'aven't got a job like that. Can you do anything else?'

“ ‘ Yes,’ sez the Army, ‘ I can challenge all persons approachin’ my post between tattoo an’ reveille, turn out the guard to generals an’ all armed parties, an’ take charge of all Government property in view of me post,’ sez the Army. —

“ ‘ Can you fix a ’lectric bell?’ sez Civil Life.

“ ‘ No,’ sez the Army.

“ ‘ Can you drive a traction engine?’ sez Civil Life.

“ ‘ No,’ sez the Army.

“ ‘ Can you make a box, or set a line of type, or draw a plan, or make out a specification, or do anything that the crowd round the dock gates can’t do?’

“ ‘ No,’ sez the Army.

“ ‘ Well,’ sez Civil Life, regretful, ‘ you’d better join the mob at the docks —an’ you’ll find the Salvation Army shelter down the second turnin’ on the right.’

"Seven years!" said Smithy reflectively, "an' about two years of that spare time. A chap could learn anything in seven years—if there was anybody to teach 'im.

"'Teach me a trade,' sez the Army.

"'Good gracious!' sez the Country, 'orrified. "I couldn't think of such a thing—don't I clothe you, an' feed you, an' pay you?'"

"'Yes,' sez the Army; 'but teach me something—if it's only makin' mats, like you do in prison, or carpentering, like you do in workhouses and reformat'ry schools.'

"'But,' sez the Country, very agitated, 'if I teach you this you'll be competin' with the taxpayer.'

"'That's all right,' sez the Army, 'I want to be a taxpayer myself.'"