

ADVERTISING THE ARMY

“It’s a great thing, getting a staff billet,” remarked Private Smithy, resplendent in mufti of the hand-me-down pepper-and-salt variety. Smithy wore mufti consequent upon his recent appointment as groom to Major Somebody-or-Other, Deputy-Assistant-Adjutant-General (a) to Goodness-Knows-What District.

“It’s a relief to get out of regimentals,” he sighed, self-consciously thrusting fingers into unaccustomed pockets. I ventured to murmur that he looked ever so much better in a scarlet coat and white belt, but Smithy demurred.

“Red tunics is all right in a way,” he remarked philosophically, “but give me a smart civilian suit, turn-down collar, and a pair of brown boots for a change.” At

Smithy's request I "waited a bit" whilst he explored a small tobacconist's in the High Street.

He returned after a short absence, red in the face, but triumphant.

Seven for a shilling—and an imitation crocodile leather case thrown in," he explained. "Have one?" Smithy added, with the air of a connoisseur, that it was "almost impossible to buy a good cigar under tuppence."

Two draws convinced me that it was quite as impossible to get the genuine article at the rate of a shilling for seven.

"The red coat attracts a few, I'll admit," resumed Smithy. "I've known two silly jossers in my time who've joined the Army for the sake of the scarlet. One got his ticket three months after."

"Ticket," I may say in parenthesis, is the terse barrack-room formula for certificate of discharge.

" Colour blind, 'e was," Smithy went on, with an amused smile. " No, red coats don't bring recruits, nør," added Smithy emphatically, " nothing that the War Office ever did brings recruits." We were passing a hoarding as he spoke, and suddenly clutching my arm, he stopped dead and pointed to a placard. It was neatly printed in red and blue, and was about the size of a newspaper contents bill. It ran :

RECRUITS WANTED
FOR EVERY BRANCH OF
THE ARMY

GOD SAVE THE KING !

I nodded and we resumed our walk.

" God save the King !" repeated Smithy flippantly. " God save the King if he don't get no more recruits than that there notice will bring him ! " and Smithy laughed sarcastically.

ADVERTISING THE ARMY 27

He was silent for a while, and so occupied with his thoughts that I was able to drop my cigar down a friendly drain without observation.

"They can't get recruits nowadays," he resumed at length, and then, striking off at a tangent, "Why do fellers enlist?"

I thought it might be for the glory of a noble profession, and ventured to express this thought.

Smithy's reply was conveyed in one coarse, contemptuous word.

"Do you know why I enlisted?" he asked.

I did not hazard an opinion, and he continued. "Broke," he said tersely. "Broke to the wide, wide world; out of a job and had a row with the girl—but mostly I was out of a job.

"Show me a soldier," said Smithy, with a sort of gloomy enthusiasm, "and

I'll show you a man who at some time or other has got down to his last tanner.

"Mind you," he added cautiously, "there are thousands of chaps in the Army—sergeants on the strength and all that, who've got on well and 'ave educated theirselves—they'll tell you, if you ask 'em, why they 'listed; it's because they struck pa with a roll of music and ran away from home."

Smithy ended this speech in a hoarse falsetto, presumably in imitation of some person or persons unknown.

"Why! I know a man—quarter-master-sergeant, too—who's got two houses of his own, and can vamp the accompaniment to any song you like. When he 'listed he walked into barracks on his uppers.

"And now he's got two houses—being a quartermaster-sergeant," added Smithy darkly, and not a little vaguely.

ADVERTISING THE ARMY 29

“And so long as the War Office is the War Office,” he went on, “you’ll always have an army of hard-ups. Because why?”

“Because,” I submitted rather sadly, “the greater bulk of the population——”

“Not a bit,” said the optimist, demolishing the results of systematic observation with a fine disregard for statistics. “Not a bit. It’s because the War Office don’t know what attracts soldiers.

“Why! may I be (three expurgated words) if I didn’t see a bill the other day outside St. George’s Barracks—it was called ‘The Advantages of the Army’—and what do you think the pictures on it were about?”

“One showed what a happy life a fine young feller could lead in the Royal Engineers.’ Picture of two pore Tommies in their shirt-sleeves carrying about a ton

of wood, whilst three others was diggin' a big hole in the ground. 'Bridge-buildin' and Trenchin',' said the picture.

"Didn't you buy one of them books they was advertising so much last year?" Smithy asked abruptly.

I confessed.

"Did they send you a book showing you the advantages of buying a—what-do-you-call-it Britannia?"

I owned up to three pamphlets, eight letters, and a telegram.

"Ah!" said Smithy craftily, "and did they send you a picture showing you how you might get the brokers in if you didn't pay your instalment? No, of course they didn't. Well, this 'ere bill had six pictures. A pore slave of a lancer cleanin his saddlery—advantages of the cavalry; a Tommy got up in marchin' order, with fifty pounds of equipment on his back—advantages of

ADVERTISING THE ARMY 31

the Line ; and so on. What made 'em stop short of havin' one showin' Tommy being frog-marched to the clink," added Smithy with gentle irony, " an' labellin' it ' Advantages of the Canteen,' I can't imagine."

" What would attract a desirable class of recruits to the Army ? " I made bold to ask.

" You'll laugh when I tell you," said Smithy very seriously. " A neat uniform for walkin' out ; neat regulation boots instead of beetle crushers ; a cap that ain't a pastrycook's cap.

" Make your bloomin' soldier advertise the Army ; make him look so as every counter' jumpin', quill pushin' board school boy who thinks 'e's a cut above Tommy will be proud to change clothes with him. Dress him as ugly as you like for fightin' ; but when he's at home, where he'll meet his pals and, likely as

not, the girl he left his happy home for, give him a uniform that a civilian might envy."

Smithy grew warm.

"If you want to show the advantages of the Army in pictures, give a picture of a soldier as he fancies himself best. Show his institutes; show him playin' billiards; show him in India lyin' on 'is charpoy with a bloomin' nigger servant taking orf his boots and another one pullin' a punkah. Show him in China ridin' like a lord in a ricksha; show him in his white helmet smokin' a cigar—ten for four annas—or in Gibraltar seein' a bull-fight; *but don't show him in his shirt-sleeves carryin' coal!*"

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I was sayin' good-bye to Smithy when Nobby Clark of "B" Company met us.

Rude criticism of Smithy's civilian clothes was followed by a proposal that

Smithy should accompany Nobby for a stroll round the town.

Smithy drew himself up.

“I hope, Private Clark,” he said haughtily, “that I respect myself too highly to be seen walking about the streets with a common soldier !”

