

ARMY MANNERS

Officers commanding regiments are instructed to note among their subordinates such defects as shortness of temper or weakness of character likely to harm them in their career.—VIDE ARMY ORDER.

I STEPPED back quickly on to the kerb ; the cab wheel that brushed against the sleeve of my coat spattered me with black mud.

The cabman threw over his shoulder the rudest expression he could summon at the moment, and I, who am a terrific linguist where the bad language of foreign countries is concerned, fired off three choice morsels of Tamil, which, had they been translated, would have brought that cabman back thirsting for my blood.

Smithy from a place of safety on the pavement chuckled.

“Don’t lose your temper,” advised my military friend—on furlough, by the way, and spending the Christmas holidays with a married sister off Portobello Road. “Puttin’ down bad temper’s a new Army reform.”

We had crossed the road in safety and were walking up Queen Victoria Street.

“Wot we want in the Army nowadays is politeness; bad language we can’t abide; if we can’t be good soldiers, let’s be little gentlemen. The Anchester Regiment is the politest regiment goin’; they call us the ‘After you’s’; our motto is, ‘Quo fus et gloria ducunt,’ which means, ‘It’s far better to be decent than glorious’; ‘if fact——”

“In fact you’re talking a lot of rot,” I said irritably. Smith smiled in a superior way.

" The other day," he went on, without taking further notice of my interruption, " we 'ad a lecture ; Uncle Bill it was, the chap that 'ad the motor-car. ' Company will parade at 11 a.m. in " B " Company's barrack-room for a lecture on military manners, by Captain Umfreville.'

" We all like lectures," explained Smithy ; " you can sit down to 'em, an' there's generally a fire in the room. Well, Uncle Bill starts off with a long yarn about a new Army Order, sayin' that chaps must not lose their tempers with other chaps ; they ought to be polite an' kind, an' courteous, an' he finishes up by sayin' he hoped he'd see an improvement in the company, that before we let our angry passions rise we ought to count twenty.

" After lecture we all goes over to the canteen, me an' Nobby Clark an' Spud Murphy an' Ugly Johnson.

"All the chaps was talkin' about Uncle Bill's lecture, an' a chap of the 'G' Company says they's bin havin' a lecture too, about losin' your temper, in fact, the whole bloomin' reg'ment was lectured on it.

"We take it in turns to buy beer," explained Smithy; "this day it happened to be Spud's turn, but he seemed to forget it.

"'Pardon me, Spud,' sez Nobby, as polite as you please, 'talkin' about beer——'

"'I wasn't talkin' about beer, dear friend,' sez Spud, liftin' his cap.

"'Well,' sez Nobby, tryin' to smile in a friendly manner, 'suppose you talk about it—comrade?'

"Nobby nearly choked sayin' 'Comrade,' own' to his hatin' Spud Murphy worse than poison.

"So Spud shuts his eyes an' makes a

noise like a chap thinkin'. 'Um—m—ah—oh, yus,' et cet'ra, whilst me an' the other chaps stood gaspin' for a drink.

" 'When you've done makin' faces,' sez Nobby, gettin' red in the face, 'p'raps, gallant comrade, you'll buy some beer.'

" 'It ain't my turn, dear Nobby,' sez Spud, as bold as brass.

" Nobby sort of went blue.

" 'Not your turn!' 'e sez in an 'usky voice, 'not your turn—gallant soldier; not your bloomin' turn—brother?'

" 'No,' sez Spud shortly; 'I bought it yesterday—comrade.'

" Nobby looks round at all the chaps who was watchin' 'im be polite to Spud, an' sez :—

" 'Bought it yesterday, comrade? Why, you funny-faced perisher, it was Me wot bought it yesterday!'

" 'Be polite,' sez Spud; 'don't lose

your temper,' 'e sez, ' or you'll be gettin' what you're askin' for,' 'e sez.

" 'Wot's that?' sez Nobby, 'beer, you daylight robber, you thievin' recruit!'

" 'Wot you're askin' for—comrade,' sez Spud, still tryin' to be polite, 'is a thick ear.' "

Smithy went on to a faithful recital of what Private Clark had said in response to this threat of personal violence.

For reasons purely private I suppress the lurid details.

" So at last Nobby paid for his own pint," Smithy resumed, " and sat in a corner by hisself, countin' twenty. For about a week after the barracks was like a Sunday school.

" The orderly sergeant comin' round to warn chaps for duty was like a parson givin' out notices just before the collection.

" 'Is Private Jordan here?' sez the sergeant.

" 'Yes, Sergeant,' sez Jerry Jordan.

" 'I regret that I must warn you for picket duty to-morrow evenin'.'

" 'Thank you kindly, Sergeant,' sez Jerry, who'd made arrangements to take his girl out that night.

" 'Is Private Purser here?'

" 'Yes, Sergeant, at your service,' sez Long Purser.

" 'It's my painful duty to inform you that you must appear at company office to-morrow morning to answer the charge of not complying with an order.'

" 'Don't mention it, Sergeant,' said Purser.

" One night Nobby comes to me an' sez, 'Look 'erè, Smithy, I'm about fed up with this countin' business

" 'Are you, comrade?' I sez.

" 'Not so much of the "comrade,"'

sez Nobby nastily ; ‘ I’m gettin’ tired of hearin’ Spud Murphy call me “ ‘ole friend ” an’ “ chummy ” an’ “ comrade,” an’ the very next time he comes snackin’ me, I’ll put him through the mill.’

“ ‘ Will you, dear friend ? ’ sez I.

“ ‘ Yes, I will—fat ’ead,’ sez Nobby.

“ Next day, me an’ Nobby bein’ orderly men, we went down to the cookhouse about four o’clock to draw the tea.

“ Spud’s our cook ; so Nobby sez to ’im :—

“ ‘ Ullo, greasy, wot’s the price of drippin’ ? ’ Spud’s got a second-class certificate, so rather fancies hisself.

“ ‘ Be a little more polite, Private Clark,’ ’e sez in a loud voice so’s the sergeant-cook could hear.

“ So Nobby sez something to ’im.

“ ‘ Did you ’ear that ! ’ sez Spud in an ’orrified voice.

"So Nobby sez something else to 'im.

" 'Don't use that language in this clean cook-'ouse,' sez Spud loudly, but the sergeant didn't take no notice. 'I'm surprised at you, Private Clark, losin' your temper like that.'

"So Nobby sez something else to 'im.

" 'Say that again,' sez Spud, takin' orf his coat.

" 'Count twenty,' sez Nobby with a sneer, 'like I do.'

" 'Say that again,' sez Spud, so Nobby did."

Smithy paused to ruminate on that joyous memory.

"We got 'em apart at last, an' the sergeant-cook fell-in four of us to put 'em both in the guard-room.

"Next morning they was both up at company office, an' Uncle Bill sez, 'Did you count twenty, Clark?'

“ ‘ Yes, sir,’ sez Nobby, ‘ five at a time,’
'e sez.

“ ‘ I ought to send you before the
Colonel,’ sez Uncle Bill, ‘ but I won’t ;
you’ll be both let orf with a caution.’ ”

“ That was very sporting on the part
of Umfreville,” I remarked in some sur-
prise.

“ Yes,” said Smithy, with a ghost of a
smile. “ Uncle Bill doesn’t like takin’
men before the Colonel.”

“ Why ? ” I asked.

“ Him an’ the Colonel ain’t on speaking
terms,” explained Smithy naïvely.

