

## ERUDITION

“ It was read out in reg’mental orders,” said Smithy, “ on the 9.30 parade, that a new lot of books ’ad arrived for the lib’ry. ‘ Suitable books for the Soldier,’ it said, so that afternoon me an’ Nobby goes over to the coffee-shop where the lib’ry is to ’ave a look. There was lots of other chaps there, an’ we ’ad to take our turn.

“ All the chaps was shoutin’, ‘ Come on, Mac, give me that red one,’ an’ poor old Macmanus got ’isself all tied up in a knot tryin’ to put down the names of the chap’s that took out the new books. When it come to me an’ Nobby’s turn there was only two books left. Nobby got a blue one an’ I got a red one.

" ' Wot's yours, Smithy ? ' sez Nobby, an' I read it out :

" ' *Temp'rance Statistics of the Army in India.* ' "

" ' Who—Stat What's-'is-name ? ' sez Nobby.

" ' Some bloomin' teetotaller, ' I sez. ' Wot's yours ? ' "

" ' ' *Ydraulics for Garrison Artillery,* ' ' e sez. ' Whose she, I wonder ? ' "

" Spud Murphy got a book about *Tactics in the Crimea*. George Botter (of ' G ' ) got a yaller book about *Afghanistan in Relation to the Frontier Question*. Mouldy Thompson got a big book about *The Story of the Army Service Corps*, whilst old Happy Johnson got the best of the lot, *Records an' Nicknames of the British Army*.

" We all takes our books to the barrack-room, an' there was me an' Nobby an' all the rest of the chaps sittin' down

holdin' our heads tryin' to understand what the books was about.

"When we gets over to the canteen that night everybody was tryin' to show off-

"Spud comes strollin' up to where me an' Nobby was sittin'.

"'Ullo, Nob,' 'e sez.

"'Ullo!' sez Nobby; 'what do you want, funny face?'

"Spud sits down alongside of me an' Nobby.

"'Talkin' about the Crimea——' 'e sez, like a chap sayin' a piece.

"'I wasn't talking about the Crimea,' sez Nobby.

"'Ave you ever noticed that a great stragetic opportunity was lost——'

"Nobby puts down the can 'e was drinkin' out of.

"'Hold hard,' 'e sez. 'I think I grasp your meanin', Spud. You're

referrin', unless I am mistaken, to the time when the garrison artillery didn't start workin' their 'ydraulics in a proper manner.'

" 'No, I ain't,' snaps Spud. 'I'm talkin' about the tactics in the Crimea.'

" 'An' I'm talkin' about 'ydraulics,' sez Nobby as calm as a cucumber, 'becos that's the book that I'm readin'.'

"It was pretty sickenin'," explained Smithy, "wot with George Botter tryin' to pretend 'e knew all about Afghanistan, an' Happy Johnson wantin' to make bets about who was the first colonel of the Anchesters.

"Mouldy Thompson got to 'igh words with a driver of the A.S.C. about the Army Service Corps.

" 'I suppose you don't know, Cockey,' sez Mouldy to this chap, 'that the old A.S.C. used to be called the Muck Train?'

" 'No, I don't,' sez the A.S.C. chap

nastily, 'an' wot's more, I don't see no call to go makin' personal remarks.'

" 'Where no offence is meant, it is 'oped that no offence will be took,' sez Mouldy. 'Well, as I was sayin', the Muck Train——'

" 'Shut up,' sez the A.S.C. chap, 'or I'll shut you up.'

" Just before 'first post,' me an' Nobby was sittin' in the corner talkin' about 'ydraulics and drink, when in comes Gus Ward of the R.A.M.C.

" Up goes Mouldy to 'im as pleased as anything:

" Do you know what they call the Medical Staff?' sez Mouldy.

" The medical bloke looks over 'is pot and sez nothin'.

" 'They call 'em the "Linseed Lancers,"' sez Mouldy, laughin'.

" The medical finished 'is beer, puts down 'is pot, and sez to Mouldy :

" 'Do you know what I call you?' 'e sez.

" 'Don't be nasty,' sez Mouldy; 'this is in a book.'

" 'In a book, is it?' sez the medical. 'Well, you homeopathic, subcutaneous mnemonic, what I'm going to call you won't be found in any book.'

"So then the medical chap started callin' Mouldy all the things 'e could remember at the minute, an' finished up with a few words out of the sick report.

"You must understand," explained Smithy, "that all the bloomin' battalion was on the same lay. There they was the next afternoon lyin' on their cots a readin' an' a mutterin' and gettin' ready to show off.

"Wastin' their time"—Smithy was indignant—"an' well knowin' that we haven't got a decent bowler in the regiment. I didn't see anything of Nobby till I went over to the canteen

that night. Everybody was talkin' about everything—all talkin' together. Suddenly I 'eard Nobby's voice :

“ ‘ No, you're wrong, Mouldy, 'e sez ; you're wrong about the artillery. ’

“ ‘ Wrong ! ’ sez Mouldy, very indignant ; ‘ ‘ ow do you know ? ’

“ ‘ Because I do, ’ sez Nobby, ‘ an’ what’s more, Spud Murphy’s wrong about the army in the Crimea, an’ George Botter’s talkin’ through ’is ’at about Afghanistan, an’ Dusty Miller’s silly when ’e sez that Athens is in Germany. (Dusty got a book on the decay of the classy or somethin’ of the sort), an’ when Billy Mason gits up an’ talks about Africa—I’ve got a word to say. ’

“ An’ with that old Nobby starts to criticize everybody, not confinin’ hisself to ’ydraulics, you understand, but goin’ all over the shop.

“ Bimeby, old Spud Murphy, who’d

been dazed by Nobby tellin' 'im a lot about the battle of Alma, strikes 'is for'ead an' shouts :

" ' Hold hard, Nobby—I see your little game—it's A's what you're talkin' about.'

" ' What d'ye mean?' sez Nobby, goin' red.

" ' Why,' sez Spud, excited, ' you're talkin' about Abukir an' Abyssinia an' adjutants an' ants—they're all A's,' roars Spud.

" ' Well,' sez Nobby, ' wot about it? '

" ' Ask him a C question, somebody,' shouts Spud.

" ' Wot about crocodiles? ' sez Dusty.

" Nobby thought a bit, an' then sez :

" ' Alligators was first invented in B.C. 921——'

" ' Shut up about alligators,' sez Spud. ' Tell us about crocodiles.'

" ' Crocodiles an' alligators are all the same,' sez Nobby. ' Everybody knows that.'



“ ‘Ear, ’ear,’ I sez ; an’ the other chaps said the same.

“ ‘ Well,’ sez Spud, thinkin’, ‘ I’ll give you a “ M ”—wot about monkeys ? ’

“ Nobby thought a bit.

“ ‘ Apes,’ ’e began, ‘ was first invented——’

“ ‘ Monkeys ! ’ sez Spud.

“ ‘ Apes an’ monkeys are all the same,’ sez Nobby.

“ ‘ Well, tell us somethin’ about colonels—that’s a C,’ sez Spud, who was gettin’ wild.

“ It took Nobby a long time to think this out, then ’e starts :

“ ‘ Adjutants was first invented——’

“ ‘ I thought so,’ sez Spud, joyful. ‘ P’raps you’ll tell me when ’cyclopedias was invented—fortnightly ’cyclopedias, wot you buy for sevenpence,’ sez Spud.

“ An’ Nobby looked quite uncomfortable.”