

NOBBY'S PART

“ I DIDN'T see you at our piece,” remarked Smithy. “ I mean,” he explained, “ the Grand Amateur Performance of ‘ The Soldier's Revenge,’ played by the Regimental Dramatic Club, on behalf of the new wing of the Anchester Lunatic Asylum.”

Smithy stopped to clear the stem of his pipe with a hairpin. I regarded him suspiciously—and the hairpin with inward misgivings.

“ There was about two dozen of our chaps in the piece,” he resumed, “ and the band was goin' to play during the intervals. Some of 'em—our chaps, I mean, not the band—was goin' to be

soldiers, some of 'em was servants, some of 'em was villagers, but half of 'em was 'rioters' in the last act.

" 'B' Company and 'F' tossed up to see who'd be rioters and 'B' won, so 'F' had to be policemen.

" Nobby Clark comes to me the day before the performance an' sez, 'Look here, Smithy, come an' act.'

" 'The goat?' I sez.

" 'No,' he sez, 'come an' be Mike Dolan, the Escaped Convict, in Act IV,' he sez; 'Fatty can't get into the clothes,' he sez.

" 'No, thanks,' I sez. 'If you want Escaped Convicts, apply to "C" Company—there's lots of chaps there that would do it natural,' I sez.

" 'Don't you be gay,' sez Nobby, 'or else you'll strain your funny bone. I'm goin' to be a gentleman visitor in Act II—one of the 'ouse party.'

" ' One of the gentlemen that washes up the plates ? ' I sez.

" ' Loud larfter,' sez Nobby, sarcastically. ' I'm goin' to be a good shepherd in the last act,' he sez, ' an' when the rioters are goin' to bash the police I say, "' Old ! what would you do, rash men ? "' an' then I tell 'em to think about their wives an' children,' he sez.

" It was pretty sickenin' them last two days in barracks before the performance. There was Jimmy Spender walkin' about holdin' his head an' mutterin', ' My lo'rd, my lord, the enemy is on us ; fly for your life ! ' an' Smiler Williams walkin' up an' down the square after ' lights out ' talking to hisself, ' Come, comrades, let us drink to the ' ealth of our noble commander,' till Smiler's company officer, Captain Darby, gave him seven days for creatin' a disturbance in barracks after lights out. Ugly Johnson broke his collar-bone when

he was rehearsin' his rescue from a burnin' buildin'.

"A lot of chaps was supposed to catch him in a blanket as he jumped out of a window, sayin', 'A British soldier fears nothin''; but the chaps who was holdin' the blanket larfed so much at Ugly's mug, that they hadn't the strength to catch him."

Smithy laughed, too, at the recollection.

"Well, the night come, an', havin' bought two seats in the gallery, I goes round to the house where Nobby's girl lives an' arsked her to come an' see the play.

"'Nobby won't like my goin' out with you,' sez Nobby's girl.

"'Don't worry about that,' I sez; 'he'd have sent you a ticket hisself, only he's so shy,' I sez. So she put on her things," said Smithy vaguely, "and went.

"We got two front seats where we could see everything, an' after the band gave a selection and the officers 'an' their ladies, an' the bishop, an' the mayor had come in, the curtain went 'up, an' there was Nobby strollin' about with a gun under his arm, pretending to be an actor.

"Bimeby the old squire came in with his lovely daughter. 'Ah, Captain Beecher,' she sez to Nobby—she was a real actress, too—'why, it seems like old times to see you at "Silverton Grange."'

"'Bai Jove!' sez Nobby, twistin' his moustache like he'd seen his superiörs do. 'Bai Jove,' he sez, an' then he forgot what to say.

"'The pleasure is mutual,' sez a holler voice from behind the scenes. "

"'The pleasure is beautiful,' sez poor Nobby, still twistin' his moustache.

"After a bit the old squire was

murdered by Monty Warne, of 'H,' dressed up like a burglar, an' he did it well, too," commended Smithy, "stranglin' him so much that they had to send out for three-penn'orth of brandy to bring him round.

"In the second act Nobby was supposed to be a visitor in evenin' dress.

"'Don't he look fine?' sez Nobby's girl.

"Nobby didn't have much to say in that act, except when young Fisher, who's got a baker's shop in the High Street, was falsely accused of murder, an' then Nobby seized his hand, an' said, 'I believe you to be an innocent man,' an' we all said, 'Hear, hear.'

"It was really Smiler Williams who ought've said that line, as Nobby was really supposed to be a villain, an' Smiler an' Nobby had words about it afterwards, till Nobby explained that

young Fisher had promised him a job when he left the Army, an' he wanted to keep in with him.

"But the last scene was best," continued Smithy, "when the hungry rioters of 'B' come face to face with the policemen of 'F,' an' Nobby comes down to the footlights dressed up as a parson, and says, 'Hold!'"

"Just as he started to say his little piece one of the policemen, tryin' to be funny, hit him in the chest with a truncheon.

"'Hold hard,' sez Nobby, forgettin' all about the piece; 'wot are you tryin' to do, Corky?'—speakin' to Corky Speddings, who hit him.

"'Go on with the piece,' sez Corky, who was wild because he'd had nothin' to say in the play.

"Nobby took orf his parson's hat an' raised it an' said, 'Hold! Wot would

you do, rash——' then another policeman threw a bit of bread at him.

"Before anybody knew what was happenin', Nobby dropped his hat an' landed the nearest policeman on the nose, an' then there was the most realisticest riot that has ever been on a stage.

"Next mornin' Nobby asked me what I thought of his performance.

" 'Fine,' I sez.

" 'Do you think so?' he sez, very pleased. 'Don't you wish you could act, Smithy, an' take the part of a young lord or 'something?'

" 'I can act,' I sez. 'I was actin' last night "The Absent Soldier."' "

" 'Talk sense,' sez Nobby, puzzled; 'you hadn't got a part.'

" 'Oh yes, I had,' I sez.

" 'What part?' sez Nobby.

" 'Your part,' I sez.

" 'But Nobby didn't understand.' "