

## THE CLAIRVOYANT

“Do you believe in ghosts?” asked Private Smithy.

“What kind of ghosts?” I asked cautiously.

“There’s a chap in ‘H’ Company,” explained Smithy—“his name’s Turner, Mouldy Turner we call him, owin’ to his havin’ been a moulder by trade. You never saw such a chap in your life,” said Smithy enthusiastically. “Give him a pack o’ cards an’ a table an’ he’ll tell you things about your past life wot you’ve never heard before.

“He charges tuppence a time, an’ it’s worth it. I had two penn’orth myself the other day.

“ ‘Smithy,’ he sez, dealin’ out the cards all over the table, ‘you’re expectin’ a letter from a dark man.’

“ ‘No, I ain’t,’ I sez.

“ ‘Well, you’ll get it,’ he sez. ‘It will bring good news.’

“ ‘An’ sure enough,’” said Smithy impressively, “that very afternoon Spud Murphy paid me two shillin’s he borrowed on the manœuvres.”

“ ‘But,’” I expostulated, “that wasn’t a letter.”

“ ‘It was better than a letter,’” said the satisfied Smithy. “ ‘Well, old Mouldy counts the cards, seven to the left an’ seven to the right.

“ ‘There’s a fair woman wot loves you,’ sez Mouldy.

“ ‘How fair?’ I sez, thinking of all the red-haired gals I knew.

“ ‘Pretty fair,’ sez Mouldy, ‘you’re goin’ a long journey acorse the sea.’

" 'Battersea?' sez Nobby, who was lookin' on.

" 'You shut up, Nobby,' I sez, 'go on, Mouldy.'

" 'The nine o' spades,' sez Mouldy, scowlin' like anything at Nobby, 'is a sign of death. You'll hear of a friend dyin'. Not much of a friend, either, but a ignorant chap with big feet,' he sez.

" 'You leave my feet alone,' sez Nobby.

" All the chaps used to come to Mouldy, an' he was doin' well. I could see Nobby didn't like the way Mouldy was rakin' in the iron, an' one night, when me an' a few chaps was in the canteen torkin' about how teetotallers die when they get into a hot climate, Pug Williams came dashin' in, lookin' as white as a ghost.

" 'Nobby Clark's took ill!' he sez, an' we rushes over to the barrack-room to

find old Nobby sittin' on his bed with a horrible stare in his eye.

“ ‘ Wot's up, Nobby ? ’ I sez, and just then Mouldy Turner comes in.

“ ‘ I see,’ sez Nobby, in a moany sort of voice, ‘ I see a public-house.’

“ ‘ You've seen too many public-houses,’ sez Mouldy nastily.

“ ‘ The inside of a public-house,’ sez Nobby.

“ ‘ That's the part I mean,’ sez Mouldy.

“ ‘ I see a man with side whiskers an' a big watch-chain,’ sez Nobby moanily ; ‘ he's servin' be'ind the counter, an' there's a red-faced gel with yeller hair countin' money. Her name's Gertie,’ sez Nobby, holding his for'ead.

“ Old Mouldy's jore dropped, an' he went white.

“ ‘ ‘ Where's my George ? Where's my soldier boy ? ’ ’ moans Nobby ; ‘ that's what she's a-sayin' of.’

"Mouldy's face got red.

" 'Boys,' sez Mouldy in a scared voice, 'old Nobby's got second-sight; he's a-seein' the pub I go to up in London an' my young lady——'

" ' "Where's my brave soldier?" ' sez Nobby, groanin'; 'that's what she's a-sayin' of; "where's my brave soldier wot rescued the colonel at Paardeberg——" ' "

" 'He's wanderin' now,' sez Mouldy, blushin'.

" 'Let's take him to the horspital,' sez Pug Williams; but just at that minute Nobby sort of woke up.

" 'Where am I?' he sez faintly.

" 'We told him what he'd been sayin', an' tried to persuade him to go to bed an' sleep it off.

" 'The next day the news got about that Nobby was second-sighted, an' when me an' Nobby went to get our dinner pint,

all the chaps crowded round an' asked him to give a performance.

"It appears from what Nobby told 'em that he'd always been second-sighted, an' when he' was a kid he had to wear spectacles.

"'Can you tell fortunes, Nobby?' sez Oatsey.

"'I can with hands,' sez Nobby, lookin' at Mouldy; 'not with cards. Cards,' he sez, 'is swindlin'.'

"'Can you tell mine, Nobby?' sez Pug Williams, holdin' out his hand.

"'Certainly,' sez Nobby, who'd known Pug all his life, an' went to school with him.

"'You was born under an unlucky star,' sez Nobby, lookin' at the hand.

"'That's right,' sez Pug, quite proud.

"'At school, you was always gettin' into trouble,' sez Nobby, who happened to know that Pug did six months at a truant school.

" 'That's right!' sez Pug, highly delighted.

" 'You've had a lot of trouble through a dark man,' sez Nobby, knowin' that Pug got forty-two days for knockin' a nigger about, when the reg'ment was in India.

" 'Marvellous!' sez Pug.

" From that day Nobby made money. Chaps used to come from every company to get their fortune told. Mouldy an' his cards did no bus'ness at all.

" Nobby charged thruppence a hand, cash on the nail; fourpence if he 'ad to wait till pay-day.

" For sixpence Nobby used to have a fit an' see things. Sometimes two chaps would club together, an' then Nobby would have two fits for ninepence.

" One day up comes Ugly Johnson, of 'D.'

" 'I want you to tell my fortune, Nobby,' he sez.

“ ‘Cross me hand with silver, pretty lady,’ sez Nobby.

“ ‘Don’t snack a chap about his face,’ sez Ugly, very fierce.

“ ‘No offence, Ugly,’ sez Nobby.

“ ‘And I ain’t goin’ to cross your bloomin’ hand with silver,’ sez Ugly, ‘cos I’ve only got three-apence.’

“ ‘That’ll do,’ sez Nobby, who never let a customer go.

“ ‘You’ve got a long life in front of you,’ sez Nobby, lookin’ at the hands.

“ ‘Ah,’ sez Ugly.

“ ‘You’ve ’ad a stormy career in the past,’ sez Nobby, ‘but all will come right!’

“ ‘Ah!’ sez Ugly.

“ ‘You’ve bin crosed in love,’ sez Nobby.

“ ‘That’s a lie,’ sez Ugly.

“ ‘So it is,’ sez Nobby, lookin’ close at Ugly’s paw, ‘wot I thought was the



crossed-in-love line is only dirt. You've got a sensitive 'art, you think ev'rybody's passin' remarks about your face,' sez Nobby.

" 'Never mind about my face,' snarls Ugly.

" 'I don't mind it,' sez Nobby, 'even if other people do,' he sez.

" Well, old Ugly got mad an' went round puttin' it about that Nobby couldn't tell fortunes for nuts, and Mouldy sez that Nobby was tellin' a lot of lies an' makin' fun of the chaps, an' business began to fall orf.

" One afternoon Nobby sez to me, 'Smithy, trade's bad.'

" 'Is it?' I sez.

" 'Yes,' he sez, 'it's about time I had another fit.'

" 'Have it now,' I sez, 'don't mind me.'

" That night, when we was all cleanin'

up for commandin' officer's parade, an' the barrack-room was full, Nobby suddenly stood up, moanin' like anything.

" 'I see!' he sez, starin' about him, 'a man with a ugly mug. 'E's a-standin' on the blink—I mean brink—of destruction!'

" We all walks over an' looks at Nobby. He was a gashly sight, rollin' his eyes an' moanin'.

" 'I see a chap,' sez Nobby, twistin' about as if he'd swollered a corkscrew, 'wot pretends to tell fortunes by cards. 'E's standin' on the brink of destruction too.'

" 'Wake up, Nobby,' I sez, soothin' him: 'it's all right.'

" 'I see,' began Nobby again, an' just at that minute in walks the colour-sergeant,

" He looks at Nobby rollin' an' squirmin' about an' then sez to me:

" 'Are you the oldest soldier here, Smith?'

" 'Yes, colour-sergeant,' I sez.

" 'Well,' sez the colour bloke, 'take a couple of men an' put Private Clark in the guardroom.'

" 'Wot for?' sez Nobby, wakin' up sudden from his trance.

" 'Drunk,' sez the colour-sergeant.

" 'I ain't drunk!' roars Nobby, very indignant.

" 'Pretendin' to be drunk, then,' sez the colour-sergeant; 'that's worse.'

" 'I'm seein' spirits,' sez Nobby.

" 'You've been drinkin' 'em,' sez the colour bloke, an' Nobby was so wild that it took six of us to get him to the guardroom.

" 'You might say seven,' added Smithy, 'for old Mouldy did the work of two men.'