

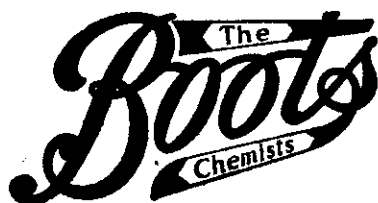
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"THESE ARE MY JEWELS"

One Way To
Deal With
Army Drill
And The
Sergt.-Major

(Written for "The Listener" by THE OLD CONSCRIPT)



THIS is the tale of a bored and weary Private who found mental calm amidst the strife and tumult of army training!

Before I joined the army I had heard many theories advanced to explain how the Average Soldier seeks to forget that he is a soldier. He plays brilliantly funny practical jokes on his fellows, he consumes quantities of fermented beverage, he tells bawdy stories; and in general I found all this to be true. But somehow I was never able to forget my military condition, until I remembered 'my Jewels'.

But now, the Big Moment. As a mercenary who claims to have kept mentally clear of the army, I feel it my duty to the nation to divulge the Secret of My Success! So here we go: How I licked the Army.

I took my Jewels to camp with me.

Yes, my Jewels; carried them in my heart I did. Allow me. . . .

* * *

MY Jewels are themes from works of the Master musicians. Having saturated myself in great music for some years, I have a sacred corner in my heart absolutely singing with lovely melodies, a glowing treasure store to draw from in time of need. Delius! Brahms! Sibelius! Beethoven! Ellington! Yes, Ellington! Master Jewellers all; indeed a mighty band of helpers!

Imagine the joy of being able to dip into such a marvellous hoard! On a long and tiring march when my staunch comrades are making the air hideous with awful old songs sung on the wrong foot, I am alone with Beethoven and his—shall we say?—Ninth. My army boots weigh a ton each, sweat trickles down my impassive—I hope—countenance. Why worry? Come to me, O rollicking Scherzo, come and remind me that life's a game, that we're masters of our destinies after all! Bubble up in my heart and help me forget that steep hill ahead. Soothe me O Adagio, seep through me like a mysterious elixir—as indeed you are; gently lead my troubled consciousness down to that innermost shrine in my heart where all is still, where bodily discomforts exist no more. . . .

"Slope AAAAH!—ONE, two, three, ONE, two, three, ONE!" — Get away with you! With every vicious move I made with this rifle, my good friend

Sibelius crashed out accompanying chords. There's a jeweller for you, guaranteed to keep any Sergeant-Major in his rightful place on the outside. Ring out in my mind incredible Seventh—let that writhing string passage thrill me anew. . . . Croon tragically to me, grief-stricken swan; weave your melody of yearning about my throbbing head. . . .

Smoko! Sprawl aching on the grass, dream in the blue above. Come to me Rachmaninoff and enthrall me with your sombre yearnings, enthrall me while my web-gear digs into my back. Concerto divine! let me forget my bayonet drill! Bring out that wistful theme, oh melancholy clarinet, so that I may forget my On Guards, my High Ports. Quick!—that theme!

"SQUAAAAAD! — Fall IN!" Owl

Ignore him, Mr. Delius. Continue walking me to Paradise Gardens! Take me where wars are undreamed of, where a khaki-clad form would be a monstrosity. Let me hear that oboe passage over and over again before I forget myself and hurl my tin hat at the O.C. Let your exultant climaxes sweep me to rugged bushlands where our New Zealand birds are trilling songs you would have loved. . . .

Oh! another march, and it's Christmas trees they're making of us this time; pack on our back, pack on our side, water bottle, gas mask, great-coat, rifle, tin hat—the White Man's Burden. . . . Wouldn't it rotate yer? But hark! What is this nostalgic music insinuating itself into my mind? Heart-weary it is indeed, telling of the tragedy of a race; simple, resigned, throat-clutching in its naive sincerity. Yes! Yes! I must hear from you, Negro jazzman! Cry into your old trumpet, let me hear your specialty—the most moving folk music ever written. . . . Aah, that's it. Black Jewellery! Rare, unique, priceless! What an antidote to an aching back, stumbling foot-steps!

"PICK UP THE STEP THERE!"

Oh, sir, and me alone in the Cosmos with Brahms! Keep your old "Left, right, left." You can darn well "left, right, left" round your old bullring till you sweat bovril; I have a certain wonderful horn passage to dream about. "PICK UP THE STEP THERE!" Oh, my, my! Still a bit out was I? Brahms must have the wrong tempo. . . .

(Continued on next page)