

BOOTS

Young and growing soldiers are prone to wear boots that are too small and too narrow mainly because of their smart appearance.—ARMY COUNCIL MEMORANDUM TO OFFICERS.

“I SHOULDN’T like to be on the Army Council,” said Smithy with all seriousness.

I looked at my young military friend with feigned surprise.

“No, I ain’t coddin’,” he said earnestly. “I s’pose it’s a good job; but never ’avin’ been an officer, I can’t say what it’s like. But stands to reason it’s a wearin’ sort of life.

“Suppose the Army Council’s meetin’ to-day, the orderly on duty lights a fire, gets out new pens and blottin’ paper,

an' Army form B47, just the same as if it was a court-martial—and," said Smithy, as a brilliant idea came to him—"it is a court-martial, and the Army's the prisoner.

"Well, in comes the Court, all in civilian clothes, Lyttelton in a soft felt 'at, an' Plumer in a red necktie, and Douglas got up to the nines.

"'Wot's on to-day?' sez Lyttelton.

"'Reformin' the Army,' sez all the others together.

"'Rot,' sez Lyttelton. 'I don't believe the Army wants reformin'--except reformin' back to the place it was when civilians started holdin' post-mortems on it.'

"'Ear, 'ear,' sez all the Army Council, except Lord Don't-Know-Who, who looked embarrassed, 'e bein' a civilian.

"'Wot about tight boots?' sez Some One after a long pause, durin' which the

Financial Secretary was doin' sums on the blottin' paper an' crossin' 'em out when 'e found they was wrong.

“ ‘ Ah, ’ sez Some One Else, ‘ wot about tight boots ? ’ ” So they all sits round givin' their opinions why soldiers should be Ugly and Comfortable.

“ Well, after a bit they make up an order :—

“ No lady-killin' boots allowed. Soldiers in possession of boots weighin' eight ounces will immediately exchange them for boots of the Regulation (or Policeman) Pattern, weighin' four pound. ‘ Fiat experimentum in corpore vili, ’ or ‘ If necessary make the experiment on a villainous corporal. ’

“ Yours truly,

“ THE ARMY COUNCIL. ”

“ Then they all get up an' stretch their legs.

" ' What's on to-morrer ? ' sez one.

" ' Army Reform,' sez the President ;
' an' let's see you all 'ere at nine, sharp.'

" Then they all go home to their little flats, an' read the newspapers, an' wish they was Japanese sittin' tight in front of Kuropatkin instead of bein' soldiers, tryin' to reform the Army so as to suit civilians' ideas.

" Sometimes it's boots, sometimes it's swearin', sometimes it's 'air—an' the ' smart, soldier-like appearance ' order : this new order about boots, though, rather takes it."

Smithy's " It " is fairly obvious.

" They was talkin' about it in the canteen yesterday, when me an' Nobby went over to get our dinner beer.

" Wilkie—that red-lookin' chap with the shavin'-brush moustache—was puttin' it about that the order was only meant for ' B ' Company.

“ ‘Don’t none of you chaps get worried about it,’ sez Wilkie, who’s an ‘H’ chap. ‘This ’ere order’s only meant for chaps with big feet tryin’ to pretend they’re Cinderellas.’

“ ‘Meanin’ me, Wilkie?’ sez Nobby.

“ ‘No names, no pack drill,’ sez Wilkie.

“ ‘Meanin’ me, you red-’aired Bloomsbury scavenger?’ sez Nobby.

“ ‘If the cap—meanin’ to say the boot—fits you, Private Clark, lace it up,’ sez Wilkie; ‘an’, what’s more,’ ’e sez, ‘don’t forget the last Army order about swearin’ an’ losing your temper.’

“ ‘Next day,’ continued Smithy, “ was commandin’ officer’s parade, an’ when the company officers walked round the ranks there was trouble.

“ ‘Where’s your boots?’ sez the captain to young Skipper Mainland.

“ ‘Under my trousers,’ sez Skipper.

" 'Too small,' sez the officer; 'put this man down for a new pair, colour-sergeant.'

" 'What's these, Clark?' sez the officer.

" 'My feet, sir,' sez Nobby, gettin' red in the face.

" 'Beg pardon,' sez the officer, 'I thought they was a pontoon section,' 'e sez, and we all laughed.

" 'I tell you,' said Smithy enthusiastically, "our officer's a comic chap.

" 'That night you couldn't get into the 'Igh Street for feet. All the chaps was wearin' their biggest boots, an' one chap standin' on the kerb got 'is toes run over by a tramcar the other side of the street—in a manner of speaking,'" corrected Smithy hastily.

" 'Oo should we meet when me an' Nobby was strollin' down Church Lane but Wilkie. Nice toonic, smart tight

trousers with officers' stripes in 'em, saucy little boots, an' a cane with a silver knob on the end of it—that's Wilkie.

" 'Hullo, Wilkie,' sez Nobby, 'wot Christmas-tree did you blow orf of?'

Wilkie looked a bit pleased with himself, an' was goin' to say somethin', when up comes the Provost Sergeant with 'is badge on 'is sleeve.

" 'Evenin', Sergeant,' sez Wilkie very pleasant.

" But the Provost Sergeant didn't say nothin', only looked at Wilkie's feet.

" 'Nice weather for this time of the year,' sez Wilkie. 'It is indeed,' 'e sez.

" But Provost Sergeant only stared at Wilkie's feet.

" So Wilkie got red in the face.

" 'Beg pardon, sergeant,' 'e sez; 'nothin' wrong, I 'ope?'

" The Provost just kept on lookin'.

Then 'e said, speakin' slowly, like a chap recitin' :

" 'The proper fittin' of boots, on which the marchin' of an army depends is a matter of the first importance,' 'e sez.

" Wilkie looks at 'im ; so did me an' Nobby.

" 'I don't do no marchin' in these boots,' sez Wilkie, an' my boots an' Nobby's sort of shuffled into the gutter out of sight.

" 'Young soldiers,' sez the Provost Sergeant, takin' no notice of what Wilkie said, 'are prone——'

" 'Are what?' sez Wilkie.

" 'Are prone to take a boot too short—in fact,' sez the Provost Sergeant, 'where did you get them ridiculqus lady's shoes from, Mr. Bloomin' Wilkie?'

" 'I got 'em,' sez Wilkie, 'from——'

" 'No man who wasn't a lunatic

would wear such fal-lal ; they was meant for women, not soldiers.'

“ ‘ I got 'em—— ’ sez Wilkie.

“ ‘ Makin' yourself a laughin' stock,' sez the Provost, gettin' wild, ' wearin' boots that nobody but a fat-headed, dandified, ijiotic recruit would think of disgracin' 'is foot by puttin inside.'

“ ‘ I got 'em off the Colonel's groom,' sez Wilkie, short.

“ ‘ Where'd 'e get 'em?' sez the Provost.

“ ‘ They're a pair of the Colonel's old 'uns,' sez Wilkie, ' what 'e gōt rid of— they was too big,' 'e sez.