

THE INFANTRY FIELD EXERCISE.

The Red Book of 1870 was an immense advance on its predecessors, and for it every infantry officer has reason to be thankful to Captain Malton and his *collaborateurs*. But it was not to be expected that so great an undertaking should be at once complete and faultless in detail. Such a large number of corrections have been found necessary, that convenience requires a new edition in which they should be incorporated in the text. Probably this may be shortly issued; and if so, it would now be good time to bring forward any weak points that have been discovered in the three years practical test "the new drill" has undergone.

There are in the Service very many officers capable of offering valuable suggestions grounded upon intelligent experience; and it will give us much pleasure to afford an opportunity to such critics for discussing the subject. No doubt due consideration would be given to any fair and reasonable criticism in the proper quarter.

By way of commencement, some points are submitted by our correspondent "X. C." in which the writer's experience has led to the conclusion that alteration has been scarcely improvement, or that reform has hardly gone far enough. There is scarcely a point in which our correspondent's suggestions do not strike us as being sound and well worthy of the consideration of the next revisers of the infantry field exercise.

1. The Captain of a company is no longer a mere guide, but is posted where he can be of real use in superintending his command. Yet the field officers are still encumbered with the cares of dressing and covering. The further development of the admirable system of working a regiment by half battalions, as in brigade, will surely necessitate their relief from these subordinate functions, which might very well devolve on the adjutant, for one wing; on the musketry-instructor, or a subaltern, mounted as field adjutant for the other.

2. The sword is returned in skirmishing, yet is still carried drawn, to the great inconvenience and even danger of its bearer, in battalion movements, when the troops are not firing, nor even supposed to be in sight of the enemy. The sword should, as a rule, only be drawn when bayonets are fixed. The right hand should be free for pencil or field glass, which latter, by the way, should be a part of every officer's uniform, by regulation.

3. Several terms and word of command have very properly been assimilated to those in use in cavalry. But here, too, reform has not gone far enough, and alteration has not been altogether happy. "Troop" and "squadron" would be far better than "company" or "double company"; "half company" is no improvement on the "sub-division" ("platoon" has been suggested, and is familiar and expressive); nor "half-battalion" on the old "wing" which there was no danger of confounding with the "wing" of a whole army. It is difficult to understand any practical military man sanctioning such *sesquipedalia verba* as these and others, such as "column of double companies," &c.

4. Many of the minor details certainly require revision. Why is the difficult and intricate "countermarch by ranks" (invented solely for the emergencies of the obsolete close column) retained instead of the simple and speedier "countermarch in files" or "fours"? Why is not "file formation" ordered to be substituted, whenever possible, for the wheel? Why,

in marching past in quarter-column, are troops armed with the long rifle to carry it at the trail instead of at the slope—its proper position in field movements? And could not the long process of teaching recruits "their fours" be much condensed by simply instructing them to form fours deep at once at the word "Fours" and the to turn as required on getting the further command, "Right" "Left" or "About"?

5. The most mischievous items of "the new drill" have been very conveniently comprised in pages 169—173 of Captain Malton's "Elementary Drill," under the head of "Independent Movements of the Rank and File."

It may be very pretty to see a battalion of Rifles or Guards, rendered perfectly steady and precise by constant practice, turn about on the caution to "break into column" from line, or to form fours in the correct direction, &c., when warned to prepare for cavalry, in square; but it should be remembered that the drill book is intended, not for smart Guards and Rifles only, but for Militiamen who have not drilled for eleven months, and for Volunteers, whose "superior intelligence" is sometimes expected (by themselves) to stand them in stead of parades altogether.

The old rule that distinguished a "caution" from an executive word of command was a very sound one, and should be a rule absolute. A little extra quickness and smartness may well be sacrificed to certainty and accuracy. What is the result with half the auxiliary forces one sees at exercise? About a quarter of the rank-and-file obey the caution, and there arises a buzz of voices prompting and objurgating the rest from the whole supernumerary rank. These subtleties are all very well in Hyde Park, with level turf almost fit for a croquet ground, and troops drilled till they could dance quadrilles; but let the compiler of such intricacies as for instance, the authorized* method of forming square from line on the centre of a battalion, and reforming line or column therefrom, imagine his manoeuvre as performed by the Royal Squirearchy Light Infantry Militia, or the Loyal and Independent Mercantile Rifle Rangers Volunteers, with shot and shell whistling about their ears and their nerves unsteady by the sight—or worse, rumour—of cavalry (Lancers for instance) in their immediate neighbourhood. Consider what the individual soldier has to keep constantly in mind already.

He has to remember (1) whether he is front or rear rank; (2) a right or left file; (3) an odd or even number; (4) the number of his company; (5) of his half-company; (6) of his section, and whether he is in a right or left half battalion or company; (7) which is his proper front; with many other things "too numerous to mention." It is desirable or expedient to add to this load on his mind, simply for the sake of show, or to save his officer's breath?

Common sense says no. A mistake may be the turning point of a battle. Cut away, therefore, the chances of mistake, as far as can possibly be done. And as regards our present field exercise, there can be no better commencement in this direction, than the excision and deletion of all the mantraps and pitfalls which are summarised in the five pages above noted, of Captain Malton's little work.

* Since writing the above, we have the following as part of a G. O. from General Lysons, commanding at Cannon Chase:—"The Major-General considers the formation of square on the centre of a battalion, from line, dangerous." (*Times*, August 22, 1873.) Well may he do so!

THEORY AND PRACTICE.

"Good morning, Cardwell, glad to see you in Devon. No, this is not my part, I'm twenty one miles from here as the crow flies. Yes, those are the Marines; look at them; well as they march past, they are not on their native heath, like that smart Militia regiment; nor contemptuous of everybody else's native heath like that corps from bonnie Scotland; nor demonstrative of feeling quite at home on every heath whatsoever, like the springy Rifles. But just tell me, don't you think you and Goschen might do better than squabble whether the cost of their good deeds ought to be borne by the War Office or the Admiralty? Well, perhaps you are right, I ought not to have mentioned it, but we must improve the occasion, and whilst you are peering the curiosity at those gallant fellows who have won the blue ribbon of the campaign, just be liberal enough to see how they bear on your localisation 'theories.' You cannot divide them into in-field and out-field, home battalion and foreign battalion: you cannot balance them with a couple of battalions of Marine Militia or adorn them, in the sixth column of the monthly 'Army List' opening with a fancy fringe of Marine Volunteers. No; whatever the value of the theory that England is to be defended by printed tables of names, in a pink cover, there before you now, as they march, is a record of the simple fact that the best infantry in Her Majesty's Service are outside your fancy scheme altogether, although the only practical embodiment of that yearning for general service with your monocular adviser have travestied from the Prussian. It is worth a passing thought, now you are *à l'armée* on Rotorough, to consider the lesson taught by our friend Goschen's men amphibious though they be, as to the best means of making the most of ground of any sort, solid or fluid, in front of an enemy. No, I never chaff. A crude dogmatic generalisation is but new fangled Toryism, and should be open to conviction as to the best model to adopt. Again, be good enough to listen to a hint—if you really believe in the superiority of general service *esprit de corps*, mark the quality of the Marines, and let your chief foreign garrisons be organised on the plan of those splendid troops who are at home at sea and more than at home everywhere else."

The Paris *Opinion Nationale* mentions that a steamship of 2,200 tons burden is now in constructing at Bordeaux in accordance with plans drawn by M. Bazin, inventor of "Bazin's express ship." The hulk of the vessel, according to the *Opinion*, consists of three vast rollers which sink into the water to their axis. It is claimed that the reduction of friction secured by the adoption of this shape, instead of the usual keel, will result in the attainment of a speed of thirty kilometers an hour. The Transatlantic journey could thus be accomplished in four and one half days. The steamer now building is to have engines of 450 horse power, and is to carry 450 tons of freight and 250 first class passengers.

The Italian fleet has been ordered to Carthage for the protection of the Italian subjects resident there. The Italian fleet will co-operate with the other foreign war vessels at Carthage.