

## DEARTH OF ARTILLERY.—NO. 3.

Sir,—Since you kindly published my second letter a fortnight ago, it is rumoured that the authorities—still adhering, unfortunately, to the universally condemned, but large patronage giving, brigade system, and to their idea of supplying to some slight extent our admitted dearth of artillery by raising two new field brigades—have partially adopted a portion of my suggestion, and intend to obtain men and horses for this purpose by reducing three wagons in each field battery. This is a half hearted and totally inadequate step, such as mediocrities in a difficulty delight to adopt as a stop gap, or rather stop criticism. It will, however, give us a few additional weak batteries—not a tenth what is required, but no doubt better than nothing. Unluckily, it will cost a disproportionately large sum of money, much of which would be wasted on useless, or worse than useless, appointments and “brigade staff.” My suggestions, if adopted, would, on the contrary, at no expense, effect six or seven times as much—that is, it would add ninety or a hundred cardo batteries of six guns each, while the two new brigades would contain at most sixteen such batteries; probably only fourteen. My scheme further requires no new officers at present, the Government plan necessitates the addition of sixty or eighty, of whom about fifty will be lieutenants. Here is another difficulty! The *Pall Mall Gazette* lately called attention to the serious and undeniable fact that, for the present organisation, there are not enough of Artillery subalterns to be got! Reference to the Regimental Lists will show that a considerable number of batteries have no lieutenant doing actual duty with them, while a large number have only one each, who is often away with a detachment! Of course it is mere departmental mismanagement that any one battery should have no lieutenant, while another has two or three, but the difficulty still remains that there are not enough of them, and that Woolwich cannot supply them fast enough. The *Pall Mall Gazette* suggest such an “appeal” to the Universities as was made in 1855, but I doubt that this would succeed to any extent. Times have changed, the men who at that time gave up their originally intended professions to join the army, did so under the stimulus of a great war excitement, with all its prospects and enticements; there is now only the bright and glowing look out of being fourteen years subalterns, and of being paid less than infantry captains and majors when they attain these ranks, to tempt them! Further, I was told yesterday by one of these very officers, that the studied neglect with which the military authorities have persistently treated the University men, “porsons” as they were called, is well known at Oxford and Cambridge, and has had such a bad effect that any informant doubted if a dozen candidates worth having could now be got from his University. If such is the case it is greatly to be lamented, and is one more of the long series of stupid blunders to which we owe the present depressed and unsatisfactory state of our army; but it adds all the more weight to my suggestion for the increase of the Artillery, which, as I have said, requires no new officers at present, and would leave time for Woolwich to develop her resources to an adequate extent. No doubt the whole question of the supply of Artillery officers is one which sadly wants examination and public criticism; the present mode is frightfully expensive, cumbersome, slow, unattractive, and comparatively inefficient. I purpose on a future occasion

to ask you for a hearing on this subject also; but at this moment the (to use official language) “most pressing and very urgent” necessity is to get together, to man and mobilise a sufficient number of field guns to at least make a stand against an enemy, and to that I will confine myself at present. While I write an officer informs me that the necessary gunners for the two new brigades are, it is believed, to be got by extensive drafts from the garrison brigades, which themselves have none too many men! This may be merely a “club shave,” but it is very probable, as men are so scarce, and would be a striking instance of good administration, robbing Peter to pay Paul. denuding one portion of the “mobilised army,” ludicrously so called, to supply another!

To show the wretched insufficiency of our field artillery at present—there are altogether on home service about 350 horsed field guns, ready to move more or less completely. A large proportion of these must of necessity be kept in Ireland, and many places in England also cannot be left without guns. So that, if we could after much difficulty and delay, assemble two hundred field guns, of five different natures and equipments, to oppose an invading army, it would probably be the utmost we could do. The Germans sent fifteen hundred field guns into France, retaining a considerable force at home also. So that as the matter stands, we really should not be justified in ever hoping to defend ourselves; much less to adopt what is really the best defence, if there is only ability to carry it out—viz., to take the initiative. Worse still, if a paper by Lieutenant Pratt, in a late number of the *Woolwich proceedings* is correct, the Germans have adopted a field gun which could simply, gun for gun, beat ours out of the field; a glorious result of the eternal self laudation of the *Woolwich clique* of pamphleteers! Yes, and still more; Archdeacon Wright's letters to the *Times* point to the growing discontent, not without some cause, among the men and, if possible, worse than all, among the non commissioned officers. The whole prospect is really the reverse of pleasant to any Englishman who loves his country, and adds new force to what I hinted in my last letter, that a total change of system, and perhaps of men, in military places is required; no amount of good intentions or devotion to duty can compensate for want of practical ability and broad views in our authorities; but, on the other hand, essay and pamphlet writing, and translating of foreign essays and pamphlets, must not be mistaken for military talent, power of organising and leading men—a tendency somewhat observable in some exalted quarters just now.

The urgency of the case will be my excuse for repetition; something must be done to increase our artillery at once, and that largely. The Duke of Cambridge states we might find ourselves at war in a few days—how are we prepared for it? If the war was a popular one, our Infantry would be to a considerable extent recruited by men from the Militia and Volunteers, already to a great extent drilled, and to some extent disciplined. Our fortresses could be manned by the Artillery, Militia and Volunteers—no contemptible garrison—though their artillery training has been shamefully neglected. But nothing can improvise field artillery, there is no reserve for it. Imagine the difficulty, the impossibility of mobilising four or five hundred new field guns in a hurry, and what their value would be at work which requires more practice and training than any other. We cannot keep up at full strength all the artillery we may need, the expense

would be too great, and the already heavily taxed taxpayers would not submit to the burden; and I do not say they are wrong. But I say, that we can do what is essential at no expense. We have the guns and carriages—at least we are told we have, and we trust we are told correctly. We reduce the wagons of all our field (and horse) artillery, and appropriate their horses, drivers, and gunners to the new batteries. These batteries would have each six guns, the limbers could be made to carry about forty rounds each. By appropriating the majors to the mounted batteries, with two lieutenants to each, quite sufficient officers for the reduced work would be given; the quartermaster sergeants would not be necessary for such small equipments, and could act as sergeant majors of the new batteries; at present simply no expenditure is required to give an enormous increase to our moveable artillery. There are plenty of lieutenant colonels and colonels at present for a greatly increased artillery, plenty of adjutants and staffs, not one new “appointment” need be made. Every practical artilleryist knows how very much easier it would be, in case of necessity, to expand these nucleus batteries to any given establishment, than to undertake the impossible task of creating eighty or a hundred new batteries, and even if unexpanded, a field artillery of such dimensions would be no despicable arm. Nor does this scheme neglect the garrison artillery; one captain and one lieutenant could well carry on their instruction and duties, especially as it would probably be necessary to reduce their establishment to say a hundred men—if only they are allowed to do their own work, not employed marching past and skirmishing, as, I am ashamed to say, they are at present, and not prevented from working by the enormous host of commanding officers who are at present clashing with each other at every large artillery station. I am free to confess that I am of opinion that all our artillery should be field or moveable, while the Militia artillery should occupy and man our fortresses; that every field artilleryman should be trained as gunner and driver, as in old times; that the expansion and demoralising toy of horse artillery as a separate corps—no prejudice to light field batteries if required—should be suppressed; that majors of batteries should be in command of and absolutely responsible for the discipline of their batteries, leaving the colonels for more important work than “caring prisoners,” that sergeant majors should be “warrant officers,” with other desiderata, all now in the dim future, but which I am convinced I shall see tried out some day when the light of criticism has shone more directly on the army. But at present my object is to show how we can get some six or seven hundred field guns on foot, and to that I confine myself.

I forgot to mention that the field artillery cannot at present be effectively supplemented from the garrison artillery; the latter, thanks to the magnificent projects of the scribblers and idealists, are not now taught even elementary field gun drill. It is hard to believe, but so it is.

Yours truly,

SWINGLETREE.

Junior United Service Club, Jan. 5.

—Broad Arrow,

The *Echo* says the Scottish Rifle Club has duly considered the proposal of Sir Henry Halford for sending a combined British team to Philadelphia, and resolved not to accept but send a team of its own.