

West Point as Seen by an Englishman.

A British officer furnishes the *N. Y. World* with an account of a visit to West Point and some criticisms on that school. First we have a description of General Parke: "A very distinguished military looking man, enveloped in a huge army overcoat. Tall, slight, and of a very upright figure, he looked every inch of him a general officer. He had the fresh, clear complexion noticeable always in a man who is accustomed to out-of-door work. His full, strongly-marked features were set off by a thick head of gray hair, with gray moustache and well-trimmed side whiskers. The funny little French cap placed jauntily on his head completed the attire of this officer. He was accompanied by two very aristocratic ladies, evidently his wife and daughter. Our talk at luncheon is principally of a military description. The general is very anxious to know my impressions of what I have seen already at West Point, and having given them to him in almost the same words as those noted here, with a few rather more outspoken ideas, he appears to agree with me in most of my criticisms."

The adjutant is described as Mr. Brown, a cavalry officer who has spent the greater part of his service engaged in staff work, who is thoroughly conversant with all branches of the army, and is most pleasant companion.

Of his inspection of the Riding School, he says:

"I am not much struck with the general appearance of these horses; their legs are too long and lack the beautiful flatness and symmetry of the English troop horse; their bodies short and a decided semblance to the mule about the head—altogether making an extremely ugly animal, with no hopes of turning him into a showy horse on parade. But as I glance upwards at the saddles, bridles, and bits, what a dreadful sight meets my eye! Rust of months accumulated on the two latter articles of saddlery, with no attempt even of removal, and the leather hard and cracked in places from the want of scrubbing and soft soap." This is contrasted unfavourably with the care taken of saddles in English stables including that of the cadet colleges at either Woolwich or Sandhurst, where they have detailed to this work soldiers who have served a term of years with their regiments and are familiar with it. Our critic says: "It is to be wished that your cavalry were more particular, if only for the sake of the horse's mouth, which in course of time a rusty bit is bound to injure in some way or other. Now your cavalry saddle is indeed a far better one than ours. Not so smart-looking, but infinitely more useful."

Marshalled in line, with sabres drawn, the cadets present a very good appearance and look as if they ought to be able to stick on to anything. The horses, with their unsoldierlike, slack, slovenly and dirty grooms, drawn up in rear of their destined equestrians, and outside their stable, taken en masse, indeed look a sorry lot. I miss the champing of a bit, the throwing up of the head and the showy appearance of our troop-horse generally when I look at them. The order is given to return swords and stand to their horses. Each cadet chooses the horse opposite him when he faces about, and the individuals facetiously termed "soldiers" slouch out of the school and await any order that may be given them.

"Prepare to mount," "Mount," "File to the right and circle," quickly follow in the sharp decisive tones of the word of command given by the riding-master. "Draw swords," "Trot."

Now begins my criticism as I stand in the gallery; nor have I to wait long to find grievous faults. A few cuts and points are being performed by the cadets. They are what is termed riding on the right rein, which means really they are circling to the right, as it is called in this country, but in ours "going large" to the right, consequently every cut is to the right, as the board prevents them from executing the left cuts.

As each cut is given every horse swerves nearly into the middle of the school. I look to find the reason of this, and quickly discover its cause. In nine cases out of ten in bending down to deliver the low cuts the cadet's spur or heel comes in contact with the horse's left flank, and being accustomed to obey the pressure of the leg he naturally swerves in the opposite direction. Of course, as every cavalry man knows, the pressure should be given to the side on which the cut is delivered to keep the horse at the requisite distance to make the cuts serviceable, for by the animal swerving into the object aimed at half the power of the arm is gone, and he is liable to come down with the flat edge of the sword on to the shoulders of his intended victim. Again, there is no uniform distance between a horse's nose and croup, and seeing these energetic youths slashing with might and main at imaginary foes I tremble for the safety of the next horse's head, and fully expect to see ears severed from their owner's cranium, flying in all directions. However, by great luck no such accident happens, and we are spared the pain of witnessing any catastrophe of this description.

Now, in the cavalry education practiced at West Point there are many points greatly to be admired, and one regrets that they are not

put into use generally at home. The first is the picking up of the sword from off the ground when mounted, a feat comparatively easy to the lookers-on, but in reality by no means so easy as it looks. I need not explain the usefulness of this exercise, for it explains itself. The next is the cutting of the sword exercise with each hand in turn. It teaches the soldier to rely equally on both hands, and if one should happen to be wounded the sword can be transferred to the other, and with but little inconvenience experienced to the owner. Mounting a bare-back horse while at the gallop is constantly practiced here, and I am surprised at the seemingly easy manner in which the cadets accomplish it. Heads and posts and other cavalry evolutions are gone through in their turn, and altogether a very thorough and complete riding lesson has been given, with the exception of a few faults I have quoted above. As a school for irregular cavalry I should say that West Point has not its equal, and certainly as a competent teacher the instructor has not his better.

I have never seen such a splendid system of drawing carried out with such precision, and as this branch as well as everything taught here is compulsory every one attains a certain amount of proficiency far above the average run of European cadets.

We move on to the next room, where I am introduced to the Instructor of Ordnance, and being asked if I would care to listen to some of the recitations, I gladly assent and seat myself next to him at the table. Drawn up in line with back towards us are some dozen students engaged in illustrating the means of heavy gun transportation on huge slates nailed to the wall. The Instructor himself, with half-closed eyes, leaning comfortably back in his chair, is listening to the recitation of one cadet who is standing strictly at attention before him and answering with great correctness the questions put to him. This officer has no book in his hand, and but for his shrewd questions and learned explanations one would imagine that he was paying no attention whatever to the lesson he is engaged in hearing; and when it comes to the turn of the next one to expound his theories, he just glances at the slate to see that his work is correct, and assumes the same apparent but deceiving carelessness.

I do not propose to enter into any elaborate description of the various recitation-rooms I entered. Let it suffice that the schoolmaster and schoolboy are respectively personified here more than any other place in the college. The cadet stands up to attention, and with the exception of his not having his hands behind his back, presents the appearance of a national schoolboy saying his lessons. Even at our public schools we sit in rather a negligent manner and repeat our work in a free, unconstrained tone of voice, and after having left school and entered a military crammer's all restraint is thrown off and we are treated as students and not boys. Smoking is allowed, and unrestrained liberty, trusting to the desire to pass examination to keep us within the bounds of rational recreation. And yet we manage to pass about the stiffest examination for any Army known and are no wilder when we join than the average American lieutenant who has graduated in such an exemplary, proper school.

I strongly disapprove of the system at West Point of treating the cadets as schoolboys, as all, or nearly all are destined to become officers of the United States army, and should begin to consider themselves as men and to behave as such. They are even in receipt of pay as cadets, but are not allowed to touch it. They are not allowed pocket money, a privilege that is never denied our schoolboys, in case it may lead them into evil ways.

Life at West Point and life at Sandhurst or most other European colleges differ so widely from each other that one finds it a matter of the greatest difficulty to make any comparisons whatever. No boy in any of our public schools is so strictly watched and has so little time for recreation. In fact, West Point strikes one at first as being a school of grown-up young men, impersonating boys and going through the same amount of lessons per diem and general routine, with this exception, that instead of having games they devote their time to drill and are exercised in the various functions of a soldier.

Of course, I quite see the advantage and necessity of treating them as private soldiers on parade and at their various military duties. But is it not carrying things rather to the extreme in making them scrub their floors and perform other functions usually carried out by the lower class of servants? It is not fitting work for a future officer of a great country to be engaged in week after week, nor can it be pleasant for officers to find fault with and reprimand him for any neglect in these duties, knowing that the offender will one day don the sword and epaulettes of a second lieutenant of the United States Army and be on a par of social standing with the highest officer of the college. No; I believe this to be a great mistake and one that could easily be rectified by having special men detailed for the rooms of the cadets and who should be answerable for the cleanliness of them to the inspecting officer.

At the artillery exercises, in charge of one of the guns is a coloured cadet, black as the raven, with no sign of white blood in his veins and