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FRENCH NAVAL TACTICS.—NO II.

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The signal book published in 1861 contains in itself a system of tactics. This system, after having, under the name of *simple* and *compound* orders, selected, both for the purposes of navigation and for battle, a certain number of geometrical figures, gives the method of reassembling the ships supposed to have been dispersed, on one of the prescribed orders. It then describes a series of rectangular movements which the ships are required to follow with mathematical exactitude and at a uniform speed in passing from one order of steaming or sailing to another.

The composition of a primitive order is called a *formation*. The change from one order of steaming or sailing to another, or from one compass course to another, effected by following certain prescribed lines, is called an *evolution*.

The rectangular evolutions of the official tactics answer very well for ships constructed and armed for broadside fire. But ironclads, intended for ramming and having to fear for themselves that species of attack, should never be exposed to be taken in flank; they should, while in the presence of the enemy, even in manœuvring, preserve an offensive attitude. There has been conceived, therefore, for the modern fleet, a new system of manœuvres based on slightly oblique courses and proportional changes of speed. This method of performing evolutions, if not cumbered with minute rules, approaches very nearly the formation.

As for ourselves, we would reserve the name of *evolution* for those exact and methodical movements which the French navy has practised for the past ten years, and the term *formation* we would apply to all such cases as assumed, in any degree whatever, a certain independence of movement.

The adoption of this system only requires a revision of the "General Instructions." So far from changing the economy of the signal book, we would preserve in the ordinary course of navigation, what has always been done on leaving port, or on the derangement of the fleet from the last order of steaming or sailing prescribed by signal. Every order, simple or compound, given in tactics, has its appropriate signal. This signal suffices for bringing the ships into the desired order, whatever may be their respective positions. Let the fleet be concentrated or scattered over every point of the horizon, the effects of the signal are the same, the manœuvres identical. Every ship hastens to her station—in other words, follows the shortest route which will take her to the bearing and distance from the regulating ship her number in the fleet requires. After having in this manner rendered easy and rapid the execution of oblique movements and generalized their employment, let us pass on to evolutions.

An evolution should proceed or start from some order which has been carefully rectified. The officers who performs an evolution is in quite a different situation from one who performs a manœuvre. He should from the outset, from the very moment of the signal being hauled down, head his ship in the required direction; nor does it belong to him to determine the path he is to pursue. Each ship taking part in the evolution has its own particular course marked out for it. Should any one ship get off of her proper line, confusion to the rest of the fleet ensues; should one be too late in getting into its line of movement, the success of the general movement is jeopardied. There must be no hesitation in the performance of individual manœuvres; but, also, there must be no obstacles on the prescribed lines of movement. It is the duty of the admiral to provide against such. He has no right to count on the watchfulness of his captains; he has rather to fear it as liable to betray them into doubt and hesitation Should the captain interpose his own judgment, he would act without decision, for the officer who obeys a signal of evolutions should see no danger resulting from a strict compliance with the orders received. He would be like an astronomer finding the laws of gravitation at fault.

Informations on the contrary, there is no thing to disconcert one. Constant care is observed while proceeding by slight deviations from the course. While seeking their respective stations, it is perfectly well understood what ships are to do in the event of a near approach. The port-hand ship permits the one on the starboard hand to pass; and in case of meeting head on, both ships port their helms and pass to starboard. These rules have now the character of an international convention, all maratime nations having adopted them as the most proper for preventing collisions.

Could one conceive of rules more clear and concise for the purposes of tactics, there would still be strong reasons for adhering to the general custom, for it is in this light that the question must be regarded. War breaks out, the activity of the navy-yards is redoubled, and in the course of a few weeks a crowd of new ships are sent to sea, the captains and officers of which have not been schooled in fleet-sailing. If it be desirable that they should act in concert from the first day, it is indispensible that they should have for their guide in manœuvring not rules simply, but dogmas. It would be no time then to undertake their instruction. Would it not, indeed, be far better to leave them to that self confidence which results from habit so old as to have the force of instinct? In the present state of affairs every seaman knows how to avoid a collision at sea. Let us not, then, overload with useless precautions these simple rules, which are in fact the offspring of science—the science of the trade of the sea.

The formation is evidently the only method to be adopted in time of battle, but it would be a great mistake to suppose that a fleet, having acquired the habit of changing from one order to another only by a series of regular movements, could all at once break through those habits and execute formations with the same ease and certainty as if it had never manœuvred otherwise.

During the past two years (1870) the Mediterranean squadron has gone through a complete series of steam and sail tactics, nor was it indulged with easy practice. With evolutions the commander in chief constantly introduced the formation, or, to use a more explicit term, manœuvres.

Whatever code of evolutions may be adopted, the system we have just reviewed must remain as its final result. In presence of an enemy you may manœuvre, but you can never perform an evolution.

LESSONS OF THE DECADE APPLIED.—NO. VII.

The science of cavalry tactics is that of moving bodies of mounted men as a unit, for military purposes. Tactics depend primarily on ranks and files. A rank is composed of men ranged in a straight line, beside each other, with elbows touching, and all faced in a direction at right angles to the line.

A file is composed of two or more men ranged in a straight line behind each other, all faced in the direction of the line. A line is the same as a rank: but the word is applied to larger numbers of men, and a line moreover may have intervals between its component parts; *e. g.*: — — — —

The competent parts of a line ranged behind one another for convenience of locomotion are called a column, as column of troops, of battalions, of fours, of twos, or files; *e. g.*: | | | | | | | | |

A column is said to deploy when it comes into line. A line is said to break into column. File leader is the man at the head of a file. The man next in front to any other man in a file is his individual file-leader. File-closers are non-commissioned officers,