

Reflection and the feeling of *ESPRIT DE CORPS* have since done much to assure me that our new rifle force is wise, beneficial, and invigorating in its tendencies, independently of it being, in the present state of Europe, a necessity; I therefore rejoice at the step which I have taken.

I did not however, sit down to moralise on the reasons for volunteering, or to indulge in reminiscences of the childhood of our young national guard, now fast arriving at ripe and hardy manhood, but to note down, while the impression remains, the appearance which the review presented to those who were the actors, not spectators, on the interesting occasion.

At last the important day arrived, and colonels-commandant were divided between hope and fear in perceiving that the companies mustered unusually strong. In our regiment, one hundred more than we had ever before been able to get together attended; and we marched into the park exactly one-fifth in excess of the approximate return furnished to the War-office.

The line of approach was thronged as I never saw it before, and never expect to see it again. Every window had its half-dozen occupants, and carriages and cabs were hustled aside with a degree of unconcern, at the bottom of which I suspect was the feeling that every one had been forced to get of their way at some time or other, and that now we were to have our innings. I am afraid anybody whose pursuits led him that day from the West End to the neighborhood of London Bridge, did not much accelerate his movements by taking a vehicle. At the Strand, there was a regular block for more than half an hour. The streams of gray, green, black, and red soldiery which flowed from every quarter, were dammed up at Charing Cross, till they were able to fall in with the tide which swept onwards to Constitution Hill. Our contribution to the general current was speedily diverted through Spring Gardens into St. James' Park, and our course was then directed, without serious impediment, along the Mall and past Buckingham Palace. As the Queen was still there, although the royal carriages were flying about in all directions, we received orders to 'carry arms;' and a check occurring somewhere in front just at the same moment, we remained in that respectful attitude, I must frankly confess, longer than even my feelings of loyalty would have prompted. I began at last to have a dismal foreboding that either my arm or my rifle would drop, and that there would be a disgraceful expose of the Hundred-and-first Middlesex in the eyes of the public. Just then I learned, from some unmistakable though suppressed exclamations, that the sensation I have described was by no means confined to my individual case; and instantly, spiteful as the avowal may appear, I felt comforted, and could have held out half an hour longer. Every one of my neighbors had his own specific for relief, by getting the little finger here, or the middle finger there; but, like the thousand infallible prescriptions for the toothache, the only sound advice that could be given was to bear it. Little did the admiring public know, as they looked at us with our rifles so trimly at 'the shoulder,' and with our feet monotonously 'marking time,' what we would have given to change places for five minutes with even the most unconscious of those infants, whose mammas never could have intended them to be present in such numbers in the very densest of the crowd. At last the welcome order to advance was given, followed soon after by 'March at ease,' and a change of position instantly removed all sense of inconvenience.

The character of the crowd was now altering rapidly. We had left behind the London of every-day experience—the busy, bustling metropolis, with just leisure enough to stare at the Volunteers as they passed—feeling all the while that it was a pity they interfered so desperately with the thoroughfare; and we had got into the holiday, sight-seeing quarter, where we were surrounded by hundreds of the possessors, and thousands of the would-be possessors of green, red and orange tickets, streaming on as far as intervening obstacles would allow towards the scene of operations in Hyde Park. I have witnessed in my time numberless gatherings, which have been individually described next day as 'the brilliant concourse of beauty and fashion,' but I am bound in candor to admit that I never before saw an equal number of lovely women. Philosophers may account for it as they like—uniforms do exercise a potent influence over the female mind. What reciprocal effect may have been experienced in our ranks, I will not pretend to say; but certain it is that we got wofully out of step, and that poor Jones, who is notoriously susceptible, lost consciousness altogether, and was bumped up against dozens of times by his rear-rank man.

When, after many difficulties that beset our path through the crowd, we at length found ourselves within the enclosure, the grandeur and significance of the display was not all at once apparent, for some gently rising-ground lay between the spot at which we entered the lines and the quarter of the Park where the sight-seers were principally assembled; but enough was visible to kindle a feeling of enthusiastic satisfaction, that the Hundred-and-first Middlesex had not been backward in its response to the appeal made to the loyalty and patriotism of the country. Before us were massed the regiments and brigades which had already taken up their ground; and in the loose formation of the moment, an idea of strength, even greater than the actual amount, was conveyed. It could not be said that there was any prevailing uniform: gray, green, drab, and stone-color were there in profusion and in every variety of combination. On our right was drawn up the magnificent body of volunteer cavalry, which, having allowed itself more latitude in dress—an approach to invisibility not being equally requisite in their case as in that of riflemen—shone dazzlingly by contrast in scarlet, the true British color. The corps most distinctly visible to us was the Duke of Manchester's squadron, each member of which, as he sat, was prepared to hold his own in a cross-country gallop, the horses being individually valued at fabulous sums. On our left, there was a thick line of trees, which the eye failed to penetrate; but from the hum of voices, and the occasional cheering, it was evident that the space they overshadowed was not less densely thronged than the other portions of the Park, which we now began to perceive were literally darkened with spectators. Our mingled sensations, as we marched on to take up our allotted position, it would be difficult to describe. There was the feeling, semi-incredulous and semi-bashful, which naturally possesses men of peaceful habits on finding themselves for the first time part and parcel of a large military force, the objects of curiosity and interest to countless thousands; there was likewise the longing hope, amounting to personal anxiety, that our own corps would not fail to acquit itself at least as well as others; and there was throughout a burning desire to know 'what they are saying of us over yonder' Notwithstanding the endless variety of events on that day, I believe it to have been one

of those occasions when incidents otherwise trifling stamp themselves on the mind of a nation. I shall not forget for years the disgust I felt when a band of school-boys, about thirty in number, which was marching nearly abreast of our corps, appropriated the first genuine cheer we had received in the Park. Nothing but the strongest sense of discipline restrained me from quitting my place and kicking the schoolmaster, when he directed the boys to 'salute,' in acknowledgment of the compliment. Whether we had not sufficiently recovered our equanimity, or whether we were looking about us too much at the time, or both, I do not pretend to say, but it is certain that our first attempts at executing the simplest manoeuvres after we had been halted were anything but creditable. The consciousness that two crack metropolitan corps were looking at us critically on either flank did not improve matters. We did not actually get 'clubbed,' nor were the companies hopelessly mixed together, but short of that, I believe for the first two minutes we were doing everything that ought not to have been done. Since one unlucky 'half' in my school-days, I never remember such a humiliating sense of failure as I then experienced. At that moment, before the disorder could have been apparent to outsiders, our colonel rode to the spot, and, as if by magic, everything righted itself. He is an old soldier, who has served with distinction, and, I may say, has almost created our corps. Between himself and every member of it the strongest feeling of regard exists. He had only looked at the company in which I happened to be—from which, being in front, wonders were of course expected—and I do not believe it lost 1-16th of an inch afterwards during the entire day. Now began the tedious process of 'dressing,' which I can well believe, if directed by a martinet, may be may the means of torture to a regiment. That shuffling backwards and forwards, without appearing to move, in that peculiar nondescript gait with which elaborate servants attend at table, and theatrical ghosts cross the stage, is to me the most odious of all the manoeuvres on a field-day. In our case, it was got over as soon as possible; and nothing struck me more than the marked *POLITESSE MILITAIRE* with which the requests, rather than command, were made by the army-officers attached to each brigade, to whom the important task of 'getting a perfect line' was intrusted.

It is worthy of being borne in mind, that the volunteers who assembled on this occasion in Hyde Park—a fair average of the force of which they formed but the sixth part—as nearly as possible equalled in numbers that British army which entered on the gigantic undertaking of crushing the power of Bussia in the Crimea. Formed not of the wastes leaves, but from the very flower of English society, they were the men to fight such a battle as the world has not witnessed since the days of Cressy and Agincourt, where the odds at which Englishmen discomfited their foes were greater even than those which earned for one of Napoleon's hussar regiments the vaunted motto of *DIX CONTRE UN*.

As I mentioned already, the execution of the few simple movements, when we were taking up our position, had not filled me with the belief that we individually should be distinguished by superiority of discipline; but I soon found that something—with which I am convinced the presence of that scarlet-trouser'd subject of 'our great ally' had largely to do—had breathed into our ranks, and into our very step, a spirit and precision which I never remembered to have seen equalled on our own parade-ground.