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PRUSSIAN TACTICS.

Colonel Ouvry, C.B., late of the 9th Lancers, has just published an excellent translation from the German of a very remarkable pamphlet, "Taktische Ruckblicke, auf 1866," which everyone taking an interest in military matters should read. We take from it the following extracts, published in the *Volunteer Service Gazette of May 7th* :

Between the description of a battle as it really is, or as a creative genius may please to represent it, there is indeed an immeasurable difference. Before the last campaigns, men were obliged to form strategical conclusions at second hand. The official accounts of military transactions from 1813-15, coloured by the distorting medium of many years, corresponded very little with the reality. These, assisted by the fantastical French accounts, formed the only materials to fill up a war picture, except perhaps, a little aid drawn from the illusions and speculations of peace-time. Now, however, we have seen—seen with our own bodily eyes—the reality: and from this time forth, no one, however high in his intellectual gifts, will be justified in judging concerning the "how" of the battle, or the tactics pursued, unless he should himself have witnessed this "how." He who has not been favored by fortune in being permitted to take a part in these events rail at his destiny, but he certainly can have no right or pretence to give an independent tactical judgment.

We are far from desiring in the following pages to introduce any startling novelties; such is not our object. If what we have to say is correct, many others must also at the same time have discerned and recognized it. However generally and contemporaneously the conviction may prevail of the necessity of a tactical reform, it must be very apparent that all such innovations, before they are reduced to rule must undergo a long course of probation by all descriptions of troops; must be introduced, then prohibited, and again re-introduced. This course will naturally prevail before judicious conclusions can be arrived at. With us Prussians the problem will be solved by the experiences of the late campaign without any exterior aid. If then, these experiences are acknowledged to be sound, they must have an influence on the time and mode of carrying through the reforms in question. The experiences also of 1792-95 caused improvements in this direction, although at the expense of a very bitter lesson. It is the task of theory to anticipate

and lend a hand in the development of these reforms. It can collect that which is loose and straggling, direct observation to the weightiest points, and excite discussion.

If hereafter we enunciate views or make propositions, it does not follow that they will be of general application; they are rather purely founded on the state of the Prussian army, and what happened to it in the year 1866. They will have been elicited, not by the arm, but by the bearer of it. * *

When we reflect on the battles of 1866, in order to consider them from a general point of view, we observe throughout one pervading phenomenon; that is, a most extraordinary extension of front with a very small degree of depth. The whole force appears extended in long thin lines, or separated into individual bodies fighting independently; above all, appears an inclination to surround the enemy by means of long extensions of the wings; and in this the preservation of the original *ordre de bataille* is quite out of the question. The different divisions of the army mix themselves up, or become mixed together, sometimes in the course of the battle and sometimes before it becomes general. The several bodies of troops are formed on principles of the most different kinds; in action almost in company column, sometimes, however, in half battalions. The tactics of these company columns consist in throwing out swarms of skirmishers, their supports from time to time resolving themselves into the same; the whole of the front line now bears some likeness to the confused attack of a horde of irregular cavalry, the impulse of each individual leader carrying with him that which he finds at his side. The second line of the army which was in the rear, strives to come up as quickly as possible to the front, in order to take part in the battle; and also because a considerable portion of the shot and shell intended for the first line passes over its head and falls into their ranks. But these in their close columns cannot so easily find cover on the field, and are obliged to bide their time, and by such delay become exposed to the feverish suspense which is unavoidable when troops are kept long under fire, and thus prevented from forgetting the danger, in the excitement of the struggle.

No wonder, then, that officers and men eagerly seize on the first opportunity that offers, and make it a plea for pressing forward to the first line; the separate divisions push in whenever they can find room. By preference they incline towards the flanks, for there they can find the least impediment to their advance. Very often no reserve at all remains, or that which remains in the rear is too weak to answer the purposes of

It would be a great mistake to put into the category of errors, without any reservation, these individual and apparently irregular proceedings. Seeing that we have here to do with new phenomena, consequent on new conditions, these must be inquired into, and that which is found right and lawful in them acknowledged.

When the needle-gun, at the commencement of the fifth year of its existence, was first generally issued to the troops, it was a standing order, insisted on by generals who preached at all inspections and parades, "Gentlemen, throw out very few skirmishers—only one section, that is now as efficient as an old subdivision, let all the rest be kept well in hand." Experience, however, soon showed that the exact reverse of these theoretical rules, which appeared so judicious at the time, was the right practice. Above all things, every one sought to give full effect to the efficiency of his trustworthy arm. Why should they be held back? Why not strike with the full weight of the weapon in their possession? Thus they all dissolved themselves into a swarm of skirmishers, because in that formation the breech-loader can best be used, and was besides sufficiently analagous to a company column, which often stood more than ten deep, and fired from all possible positions. And this would take place, not so much at the word of command of their leader, who perhaps could only hear himself from the deafening noise of the guns and small arms, as from a natural consequence of the circumstance in which they were placed. We may now cast aside the imagination that the leader stands in the chivalric position laid down in the regulations for reviews and inspections, "one pace in front of the firing party to windward, in order calmly to direct the fire, to indicate the object to aim at, and to fix on the proper moment after a volley, at the command 'battalion march,' to rush on to the attack." This is a pretty "peace time" picture, necessary for the purpose of training and instruction; even the apparently novel irregularity above alluded to must finally be reduced to fixed rules, otherwise exercises and instruction will be impossible.

The leader in battle, even the coolest and bravest, will be enabled, under cover of a tree or earth-work, with his glass at his eye, to superintend operations under fire much more carefully; a useless exposure of his person would be a mere act of vain bravado; an officer commanding troops has something better to do than throw away his life to no purpose. A particular reason alone can justify his exposure to fire; such as for the encouragement of his men, should they show an inclination to hang back, when he