

For "THE REVIEW."

NOTES AND QUERIES.

NOTE.—"So much has been done in our time in bringing tactics to their first principles, and in getting rid of the pedantry of war, that it is not easy for us to estimate the disadvantages under which a half-trained Militia laboured who were taught to consider success as depending upon their exercising with precision a system of tactics, which they probably only so far comprehended as to find out when they were wrong, but without the power of getting right again."—*Legend of Montrose.*

Query—Does any one know what is doing in the matter of the new drill?

Let the above note and query justify me in adopting the somewhat quaint title of an English periodical of great value to the antiquarian, the linguist, and the general seeker of recondite information. Let me also, in extenuation of an extremely desultory gathering together of loose ideas, plead circumstances which really prevent my giving time to a more methodical arrangement of them.

The above extract furnishes me with a not inapt text for the jumble which I humbly propose to inflict upon yourself and your readers. Before entering upon it however, permit me to add to those which have appeared under other signatures, my thanks to Capt. Dartnell of the Thirty-Fourth, for his series of ably written and interesting articles. My appreciation of two or three of them is, perhaps, the more thorough that, three years ago, when I was living for a time in Rochester, I procured from a gallant friend of mine, who was a brigadier in the northern army, the system of tactics, (Cosey's and Hink's) then in use, studied both it and their "army regulations" with some care, and transmitted such remarks on them as I considered worth making, to the Adjutant General. I was then much impressed with the clumsiness and complication of the American system, compared to the perfect arrangement, leading step by step, from squad-drill to brigade movements of Col. Lysor's revision of our exercise; and, except on one point, I do not perceive much improvement in their new code, so far as Capt. Dartnell has favored us with a synopsis of it.

That point, however, may possibly be of some importance; viz: whether working by sections of fours, may not be found simpler than our present mode of forming fours.

I grant that nothing can be more perfect and beautiful than our present formation when well done, but every Inspector knows the amount of "dullering" required to produce smartness and accuracy. This would of course, be of little consequence, were we able, as are the Regulars, to devote an hour day after day for months together to the attainment of that precision which the Field

exercise itself tells us, is only attained by long practice; but what do our opportunities of practice amount to?

When I first underwent military drill (strictly so called) "sections of threes" were still in vogue, and, though unnecessary in conjunction with fours, they were not an inconvenient formation. It is therefore an open question in my mind whether "sections of fours" might not with advantage supersede the present formation, thereby saving much tiresome inspection, and possessing the greatest flexibility.

Another note-worthy point in the American Drill is the idea of making a Company always to consist of a multiple of "sections of fours." There seems to me to be a good deal in this. I should be no believer in the necessity of sections (i. e. the fourth of a company) at all, were it not for the formation of four deep squares, and even the necessity for these is diminished, at all events in the estimation of the French, who seem to approach this conclusion, ("Operations of War," p. 394.) and, indeed, something beyond it. Instructors of rural Companies are well aware that they have few greater difficulties to contend with than the obtuseness of pivot-men of sections and sub-divisions. Is it not possible that combinations of the movements of "sections of fours" might supersede the necessity of "sections" altogether. In their former system of tactics the Americans undoubtedly sacrificed perspicuity and methodical arrangement to a cumbersome elaboration of details, and from what Capt. Dartnell says of the voluminous instructions for Brigade movements it would appear that they still cling to this meretricious fault. In this respect our own Field Exercise is a model of method, style and arrangement, and if capable of improvement in simplicity and brevity can only attain those objects to any extent through the alteration of fundamental principles.

Simplicity is one of the highest results of genius. Mark its effects. Genius devises the Snider. The attainment of a high simplicity in the principle of construction of that arm topples down the tiresome and tedious old platoon exercise with its uncomfortable kneeling positions, and extends its modifications throughout the whole of "skirmishing."

So I trust to see it with many sections of Battalion Drill when the pedantry of fixed pivot flanks, and absolute front and rear ranks, shall have become as much a thing of the past as the "battoon" with which Major O'Quilligan insulted Capt. Dalgetty—a cavalier, by the way, for whom I confess to a strong liking, despite the lofty minded species of abuse which it is 'de rigueur' to bestow on honest gentlemen of the free-lance persuasion. Few, I think, will hesitate to acknowledge that the abolition of, for instance, formations to a reverse flank, would be a desirable decrease of the bulk of the Field Exercise consequent on the non-pivot

innovation. The abolition of some of the distinction between front and rear ranks is, I know, heresy and schism in the eyes of many excellent soldiers; yet, fairly considered, can any one maintain that companies properly told off, and proved rear rank in front should not work as well in that position as with the proper front rank in front. In fact the only reason that companies do not do so, is precisely because they are not accustomed to consider the ranks as perfectly reversible. Consequent on the fall of the scales of prejudice, on this point, from the eyes, would be the abolition of countermarching by ranks, and of the change of front of a column on the centre.

It is no small recommendation to Volunteers of the tendency of the present day to simplify, that every step in that direction brings the Citizen-soldier nearer to an equality with the Regular—to a certain extent. Yet would relief from the study and practice of unnecessary evolutions (and there are such even in our Field Exercise) be no small boon to the regular also, whether the leisure so gained were devoted to absolute leisure, or to the practice of more essential matter.

In the days (and long after) when Corporal Trim, fired with the reminiscence of by-gone squad-drills, broke forth to Uncle Toby in enthusiastic recapitulation of old familiar commands, and astonishes us of this degenerate day with the portentous orders—"Join your right hand to your Firelock!" "Point your Firelock!"—the pride of the service was a formal and stately routine, the remnant of which, modulated to the quickest temperament (sic dicere) of a more modern age, has not yet entirely ceased to appeal to the tastes and sympathies of lovers of order and symmetry at the present day.

To such admirers of abstract beauty a showy and complicated manoeuvre has a certain attraction. Some twelve years ago my fancy was much tickled by a very pretty one, since obsolete, the caution for which (if I remember rightly) was, by "By double files from the centre—Rear wing to the Front." The two centre sections of companies in front wheeled outwards, while the rear passed through. It was very pretty, but gave place to the simpler movement by fours from a flank. By the by, this again leads to "Query" why, if there be no fixed pivot flank, bring either wing more than the other to the front? One has therefore a kind of regret when a pretty movement is condemned, but what ever may be the predilections inseparable from the associations of bygone times, the officer who desires to be up to the mark of today must cast them "down the stream of time," and should not only throw himself into the spirit of the hour, but endeavor to discern what consequences the alterations introduced today will bring in their train tomorrow. Lord Elcho seems to have fulfilled this condition to a great extent. His ideas may not have been entirely