

MOUNTED RIFLEMEN.

The following letter appeared on this subject from Sir Henry Havelock in the *Times* last week:—

"Colonel Hamley's able advocacy of the principle of Mounted Riflemen has directed so much attention to the subject lately that I venture to ask you to publish some particulars of the practical working of such a force which are but little known. Their having occurred under my own observation will, I hope, plead my excuse for making use of the first person in speaking of them where it is unavoidable.

"All through my father's campaign in 1857 the want of cavalry to follow up his successes was painfully apparent. Later in the first half of 1858, when we had abundant cavalry, their feebleness in pursuits when far detached from infantry, their great losses and small results, attracted much attention. This led me, among others, to think of a remedy.

"In July, 1858, Sir John Douglas, K.C.B., was directed to clear the Shahabad district. He had in all over 5,000 men, but scattered over thirty five posts in a vast district; while the rebels, some 4,000 men, including the old Dinsapore brigade, the 7th, 8th, and 40th Native Infantry intact, held a central position in a jungle, twenty miles long by three broad in the heart of the district. This position enabled them to baffle us. Whenever they were pursued, as we entered the jungle at one side, they left at the other, marched rapidly to a distant part of the country, and, as soon as pursuit was abandoned, from the limited marching power of our infantry under that sun, returned quietly to their old haunts in the jungle. Their speed made them complete masters of the situation. They collected the revenue of the district, and established such a reign of terror that no inhabitant dare furnish us with information or provisions. This game lasted from July, 1857, to September, 1858—fourteen months.

"Bearing this in mind, it occurred to me, as principal staff officer to Sir John Douglas, to propose, during an interval in the operations, the formation of a body of Mounted Infantry. Sixty men from the 10th Foot, good shots and accustomed to horses, were carefully chosen and drilled for three weeks to the alternate mounted and dismounted action of Dragoons—properly so called. In October the General again took the field. In pursuance of his plans, five columns were to converge round the Jugdespore Jungle by noon on the 13th of October, hem the rebels in on all sides, and make a combined attack on their position. All worked admirably until the last moment of the concentration. Then one column of the five was three hours late in completing the circuit. The Sepoys saw the breach, slipped through the gap immediately, and were once more at large in the district. There was nothing left for us but the old story of a long "stern chase" again.

"Now the Mounted Infantry came into play. A light column was formed of four troops of the 2nd Battalion Military Train, acting as Light Cavalry. To these were added the 60 mounted Riflemen of the 10th Foot, and 100 Irregulars; and I had the good fortune, as originator of the Mounted Infantry idea, to be entrusted with the command. We started in pursuit. Two strong columns of infantry, under Sir John Douglas and the late lamented Sir William Turner, moved on parallel lines on either side

of the rebels, while we, the mounted force, kept ahead of them to keep them back.

"To state the results briefly—we marched 201 miles in five days (one day 69 miles during 20 hours in the saddle), prevented the rebels the first night from crossing the Soane 'headed' them continually, and turned them back by our dismounted rifle fire on to the infantry columns.

"This was easy to do, by getting a couple of miles ahead of them, choosing a strong line of walls and banks across their road, placing the riflemen, dismounted and under cover, in the centre; extending the four troops of the Military Train (also armed with rifled carbines) two on each flank; and keeping the Irregulars, as a reserve and guard for the horses of the dismounted men in rear of the centre. At the time to do this was always chosen, when our information had brought up one or other of the infantry columns to within two or three miles, we never failed to delay the Sepoys long enough to bring them between two fires, and cause them heavy loss. Our patrols constantly kept the infantry informed of the enemy's movements—when and where to expect them, and how to make the shortest cuts to get at them. Our infantry marched on an average, 25 miles a day for five days, or 125 miles in all—a tremendous effort in that climate. But if it had not been for the Mounted Rifles, the infantry would never have seen the rebels again after they lost sight of him the first day.

"In short, the Mounted Rifles, either single handed or in combination with one of the infantry columns, brought the rebels to bay three times—on the 16th, 18th, and 20th of October; destroyed over five hundred of them, and by giving them no rest at night or day, so harassed the remainder that they were driven out of the district into the hills and thence into Central India.

"The Civil Power resumed its authority, and a district which had been for fifteen months in rebel hands reverted at once to peace and security.

"What 5,000 of our troops had not been able to accomplish in a year under the old system of slow movement, was done in five days by 2,000 infantry and 400 cavalry and Mounted Riflemen, and this wholly through the revival of the Middle Age principle of fire and rapidity of movement combined in Mounted Infantry. So much for the power of continuous pursuit.

"These Sepoys would easily have marched thirty miles a day for a week, if only allowed intervals of three or four hours at a time to undress and cook, as their religion requires. But this is what we did not give them. No sooner had they settled down to their cooking than a rousing Enfield volley drove them to the road again, and kept them going. This repeated on several consecutive nights 'broke their hearts' and drove them out of the districts.

"At the end of the American War the idea of Mounted Infantry was worked out on a grand scale. In April, 1865, when Lee was forced to evacuate the lines of Richmond, he endeavoured to retire south westerly, with some 50,000 men to effect a junction with General Johnston. Sheridan, with a division of 11,000 Mounted Riflemen, in four brigades followed in pursuit. As at Mars-la-Tour, the other day, his object was to seize the enemy, detain him, and hold him fast till the infantry should come up. But—different from the Germans—Sheridan accomplished this by the rifle fire of his dismounted men alone; using his horses alone to keep ahead of Lee, and outflank him on every side.—The result is well known. Sheridan

stuck to the Southerners till, on the 9th of April, two whole Federal Infantry corps—60,000 men—having come up, and two trains of provisions coming to Lee from the westward having been intercepted, his force reduced by famine and desertion to 42,000 men, was surrounded and forced to surrender. This brought the war to an end. Had Lee succeeded in joining Johnston—which but for the Mounted Infantry 'heading him back,' he inevitably would have done—the campaign might have lasted for another year.

"The battle of Mars-la-Tour (or Vionville) on the 16th of August, 1870, stands forth pre-eminently bright as the most glorious day for Cavalry that the world has ever seen. The undaunted bravery of the Prussian Horse, their entire devotion and unhesitating following of their officers, enabled 24,000 stubborn German infantry, backed by the numerous artillery, to keep over 82,000 French in check till the arrival of reinforcements insured their being shut into Metz. By these devoted charges, made by one half of 12,000 German cavalry present, three hours breathing time—from 1 to 4 p. m.—was gained. A full half of the cavalry were only slightly engaged, as a detailed statement of their losses shows. By 5 p. m. the Germans had 60,000 men on the ground; by nightfall over 100,000. The French allowed the 17th to pass away in inaction. By the morning of the 18th, 220,000 Germans barred the way to Verdun, and the opportunity for escape was gone.

"Judging by the light of after events, it may be said that the fate of France was sealed on the 16th of August—That those two German Cavalry divisions bore the destiny of half Europe and of two Empires on their swords; grand results of discipline and skill, of devotion as great as at our own Balaklava, and of military science twice as practical.

"But it still remains an open tactical question whether these results would not have been better gained—that is with less loss of life—by a combined application of charging and dismounted action instead of by headlong charging alone. For instance, the most brilliant charge—that of Bredow's brigade (7th Cuirassiers and 16th Uhlans), noble almost beyond anything in history—cost 349 officers and men, killed and wounded, out of about 850, and 519 horses out of the same number, and its effect is only momentary.

"No guns were carried off; the infantry that were ridden over (they had not time to form square, so skillfully was the charge led under cover of ground till the moment of impact) were not dispersed, but inflicted fearful loss on this brigade, by their rifle fire in its retreat.

"But had this brigade to put a hypothetical case as the only means of illustrating the argument—been followed in second line at a trot by one or two battalions of Mounted Riflemen, at some 500 yards' distance, a totally different result might have been gained. The Mounted Riflemen would have halted, dismounted, and immediately got into position on reaching the silenced guns that had been ridden through.

"Their horses would have found immediate shelter in the hollow which concealed the advance of the Cuirassiers till they were close upon the batteries. The Cavalry, passing on at full career some 500 yards further, would then have retired round one or both flanks of the dismounted riflemen, completely shrouded and protected by their fire. The French cavalry counter attack would have been checked at once. The ground