

MUSKETRY IN THE BRITISH VOLUNTEERS.

From the Broad Arrow.)

The course of musketry for the Volunteer Force is to be subjected to considerable alteration next year, and the standard of qualification, both for recruits and trained volunteers, is to be raised. The changes are desirable, since it is only by excellence as riflemen that an equivalent can be secured for shortcomings in drill. But in the effort to improve the general average of performances on the range, it must be borne in mind that such improvement cannot be effected by a stroke of the pen, even when the instrument is grasped by the very highest officials. The volunteers may be divided into what are termed "shooting men" and others. The former are usually first-rate or likely to become so, whilst the latter are generally the contrary. To demand a few extra points in each class will in no way affect the good shots, but whilst probably causing a limited number to take extra pains, it can scarcely fail to render qualification on the part of the majority a hopeless impossibility. Men are bad shots either from want of practice or sheer inability. In justice to the volunteers it must be admitted that failure of any sort is seldom due to inattention. Inability to shoot straight may be due to a variety of causes of a physical nature; but want of practice, in the case of a volunteer, is usually due to one or other of two difficulties, viz., cost of ammunition or loss of "time." A certain number of rounds issued free, or even at a reduced price, would afford a means of overcoming one of these obstacles, but the last is a more serious matter. Loss of "time" not unfrequently entails, besides the loss of wages, strained relations between employer and employed. There are a great number of volunteers who attend their evening drills with exemplary regularity, but are, on the other hand, heavily handicapped when attendance is required during the hours of labour. In fact, the whole or even half-days which they can obtain are often only the bank holidays. If such men are bad shots they can only be improved by actual practice on the range. Their regular attendance at drill ensures fair training in handling the rifle. Men who cannot shoot, because their eyesight or nerves are weak, may not be any great loss if it is found necessary to dispense with their services; but if to these are added the far greater number who fail from want of experience, the reduction of the Volunteer Force would be alarming, in proportion to the several estimates by which the citizen army is valued as a whole. Few volunteer battalions, in country districts at any rate, can afford to keep many men who fail to earn the "higher grant." In most rural corps the usual plan is to defer "clothing" a man until he has been dismissed drill. In future it will be necessary to await his succeeding to shoot his way out of the third class. In fact, a man who is unable to earn a "grant" sufficient to defray the cost of clothing him and keeping up his equipment is not worth having. It is already difficult to maintain volunteer establishments as regards men, as well as officers. The more arduous the task set for recruits to perform, the harder it will be to get them. A volunteer is only a volunteer after all, and when the shoe pinches too tightly the wearer will naturally discard it.

There are some people who are foolish enough to elevate the British Volunteer upon such a pinnacle of excellence that they consider him competent, just as he is, to meet the regular troops of any foreign power. There are also equally foolish persons who deny to the citizen Army any value whatever. Now, the long and short of it is, that in the Volunteer Force we have a number of men partly trained, and therefore more useful in an emergency than others straight from the tail of the plough. Taking them as a body, this fairly represents the situation, but about 25 per cent. are sufficiently good shots to render them very formidable when acting purely on the defensive. A great

numerical strength capable of more rapid knocking into shape than raw recruits, must be admitted as the chief practicable desideratum for the Volunteer Force. Anything approaching to perfection in drill is quite unattainable, for obvious reasons, which will also prevent, to a great extent, any universal improvement in the shooting. Drill is of importance as well as musketry, and by recognising this a way might be found for raising the regulation standard of the latter without placing undue hardship on those who are prevented by circumstances from devoting time to shooting. In many corps, "points for drill" are added to scores at musketry prize meetings. The same idea might easily be applied to classification in the annual course, one point being added for every drill attended beyond the minimum required. Such an arrangement would not only encourage those who are already regular in their attendances, but afford an inducement to many who have hitherto been slack. Volunteers in general are "keen" and the fact that a man knew he had a few drill points in hand to add to his score would not make him the less anxious to succeed without them. In determining the best shots in battalions and companies, "drill points" would not of course be allowed to count.

There is nothing so hurtful to the entire volunteer movement as the systematic manner in which so many persons persist in regarding the force from a totally wrong standpoint. Those who are ignorant of war constantly endow the citizen army with perfections which, with the best intentions, they are far from possessing, whilst the authorities, on the other hand, keep tinkering with "reforms," generally speaking incapable of realisation. It is a significant fact that ten years ago the Volunteers were a much finer body of men than now, being both physically and socially far superior to those of the present day. That drill and organization have improved during the period it would be idle to deny; but the question is whether the improvement in these matters affords compensation for loss in the others. We think not. Volunteer battalions capable at a moment's notice of assuming the offensive against regular troops represent a sheer delusion; but the raw material is still so good that a few weeks would work wonders. The present superiority of training exhibited by the volunteers of 1891 as compared with those of a few years ago represents only the work of two or three days when embodied and really taken in hand. Numbers and physique should therefore be the chief objects in view, together with as much training in drill and musketry as is found compatible with retaining these desiderata. If improving the Volunteers is persisted in much further, their unquestionable value will be impaired rather than increased by "improving" large numbers off the muster rolls altogether.

A special central pivot carriage for the 5½ inch Hontoria guns which are to form the armament of the new Spanish cruisers, was successfully tried at Le Creusot in the presence of a committee of Spanish officers. It is stated to be the lightest of its kind ever constructed, and to have withstood the strain to which it was exposed in a highly satisfactory manner.

Was Count Moltke a General of the first class? asks *London Truth*, and then answers the question by saying: "He may have been, but as he never had to direct a campaign against any first-class or even second-class General, it cannot be asserted as a fact. The Austrian Generals against whom he was pitted were beneath contempt. Not one of the French Generals that he encountered during the Franco-German war was up to the mark of the worst of the first Napoleon's marshals. In war, as Napoleon I. said, good luck plays an important part, and Moltke was always in luck, owing to the weakness and folly of his opponents."