

the manner of performing it must have regard to that object. Now this is often too much forgotten on the peaceful parade-ground, and I fear has been disregarded in many of the proposed changes in drill lately mooted.

No one denies that the Red Book, like every thing else that is human, is susceptible of improvement. But there are different modes of suggesting improvements. These may be proposed in a manner which will ensure for them a full and fair hearing from those who are chiefly concerned in the question, and have the power to give effect to them; and there is another mode, which arouses all the prejudices which very naturally may exist in favour of a system long established, and under which our troops have so often been led on to victory. Now, Sir, I venture to say that the modifications proposed by Colonel Brunel and others are calculated to stir up all these prejudices against them, and were they even all improvements, which I cannot admit, to seriously damage their chance of an impartial consideration from military men.

It is one thing to propose modifications of a system, but quite another thing to propose to uproot that system by making such radical changes, not only in movements, but in the very order and formation of a battalion, and necessarily in that of the larger combinations of troops—changes, too, that for the life of me I can see no sufficient object or advantage to be gained by their adoption. When a system of drill is introduced to our attention as the “No front system,” or the “No pivot system,” I am not surprised that the military authorities should be slow to believe that the details of a system based on such an anomaly in drill could furnish anything worth adopting.

Colonel Brunel, to whose “Reformed Drill” I am now more especially referring, seems to think that the term “front” has only reference to the body of troops under his command, and that the direction in which they face constitutes their front, “except”—and here I think he begs the question—“except during a temporary retirement.” Retirement! from what? Concluding that Colonel Brunel manoeuvres his regiment as if in the presence of an enemy, this retirement must be from the *permanent front*, and that front is the position of the enemy! The front of an army, and of every regiment in that army when in the field, is the position of the foe against which that army is operating. But I shall be told that this does not meet the question. Suppose a line to be suddenly attacked in rear, what then? I reply that such an attack can be quite as well met by the order “*Right about face*” as by that of “*Right about front*.” There is a change in the word of command, but no other change that I can see. The supernumerary rank can be got rid of in the very same manner and quite as quickly in the one case as in the other, and a volley delivered against the assailants with at least equal rapidity under the present system. No, Sir, we can never do away with “front” in manoeuvring so long as we have a supposed enemy before us, and I confess I cannot see what advantage is to be gained by doing away with a “*front rank*” and a “*rear rank*” in the formation of a regiment on parade. I ask any of the advocates of the “*No front*” system to point out what they can do better or more rapidly in any one of the movements authorized in the Field Exercise. What advantage have they to offer in lieu of the many and great advantages arising out of a permanent front and rear rank? I confess I can see none.

“The front,” says Colonel Brunel, “will always be in the direction in which the men are facing or moving.” I submit that in war it cannot be so, and in support of this opinion I quote again the concluding paragraph in this clause as follows: “*except during a temporary retirement*.” This implies the fact for which I argue—namely, that there is a permanent front from which the retirement is made.

I have said that the ulterior object of a movement seems often forgotten by some of the writers who advocate radical changes in our system of drill. They seem satisfied if they save a few seconds of time, or a few inches in the distance to be passed over, while other important points are overlooked. For example, in deploying to engage an enemy it seems to be forgotten, or not understood, that nothing tells so effectually as the succession of volleys from each company as it takes its place in line. I cannot therefore agree with those who propose to bring the companies into line by file, that they may open fire as each takes its place. This would be to lose the effect of the volley, or they must wait till all have formed up before it can be delivered; and, in my opinion, moving into line in this manner would render the men less steady than if they moved up together into the alignment. There is a great deal in the “touch” in preserving steadiness under fire, and the more square a company goes into line the more steadily will they halt and the more effectually give their volley.

Colonel Brunel recommends his mode of wheeling into line by the statement that “in a battalion of 600 men, 300 rifles may be at work by the time the wheel is one half completed.” But had Colonel Brunel known the staggering and fatal effects of a well-delivered volley on wheeling a battalion into line, he never would have held up this loose and scattered file-firing of each man as he took his place in line as any recommendation of his system. But if it were desirable, the same thing could be equally well accomplished by the wheel in the usual way. The men of the inner subdivisions would of course be in line before those of the outer, and if file-firing was to be the rule 300 rifles would as effectually be at work “by the time the wheel was half completed.” As to wheeling from open column into line to either flank, it is already done every day, and so is the formation of line on the move from quarter-distance Column to either flank upon the rear company. And although not in the Red Book, this movement is a most valuable one, because you open fire at once from one company, and thus cover and defend the movement. This object, I venture to say, lies at the very root of all improvements in drill. Every movement should be so ordered as to bring, if possible, some portion of the battalion or brigade into immediate action, so as to cover it. This is the great advantage gained by the new rule for deploying on the front company. In action that company would at once deliver the volley and commence file-firing, and thus cover the deployment. The old mode of deploying on a centre or the rear company left the battalion defenceless for a time. And this leads to the remark, that our present mode of forming company squares is faulty in this respect. Instead of forming close column of sections on the second section, which admits of no defence during the formation, the columns should be formed in rear of the right centre section, so that an immediate fire might be opened from that section upon the approaching Cavalry, and the movement thus defended.

In one proposed change of Col. Brunel's I cordially concur, and have long wished to see it adopted by the service. I allude to the formation of line to the front or rear from open column of companies at the halt. The present mode of wheeling back the companies into echelon and then moving them into line is a slow and cumbrous process. The simple mode is to move the companies into line in the same manner as we form company from column of subdivisions—namely, by the companies to be moved making a half face to the flank named, and moving into line at the quick or double.

But I must not extend this letter. Let me merely say in conclusion that the real question for the consideration of the authorities is not whether this movement or that in the field exercise can be modified and improved, but whether some entirely new system of field evolutions is not absolutely necessary—a system adapted to the great changes which have taken place in the implements of war, and the arms in the hand of the soldier. The wars of the future, and the mode of fighting the battles consequent on these wars, have become a most interesting subject of speculation to military men. The vastly extended power of range possessed by the modern rifle, the extraordinary accuracy and precision of the weapon, and now with the breechloader the terrible rapidity of fire, render the problem of how the future battles are to be fought so as to achieve victory a most important one. Sure I am that the old method of fighting a battle must never be attempted in the present day; and I cannot help thinking that the improvement in cannon and the breechloading rifle have rendered our present system of drill little better than a tradition of the past. It is scarcely more applicable to the movements of our Army in the presence of a foe armed with breechloaders, telling with fatal precision at the distance of 1,000 yards, than would be the manual of field exercise in use in the days of our forefathers when armed with the yew bow and the ell-long feathered shaft; or the of Julius Caesar for his legions armed with spear and shield.

These changes in the arms of the soldier have, I fear, rendered the one manoeuvre for which the British soldier was so especially distinguished, and which secured for him many a triumph—I mean the bayonet charge—a thing of the past, and a charge of Cavalry a dream.—I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

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Colonel 1st Surrey Rifles.

During the first few days of her reign the Duke of Wellington presented to the Queen the death warrant of a soldier for signature:

“She read it, paused, and looked up at the Duke, saying, “Have you nothing to say in behalf of this man?”

“Nothing: he has deserted three times.”

“Think again, my lord,” was her reply.

“And,” said the gallant veteran, as he related the circumstance to his friends, “Seeing Her Majesty so earnest about it, I said, he is certainly a bad *Soldier*, but there was somebody who spoke as to his good character, and he may be a good *man*, for aught I know to the contrary.” “Oh, thank you a thousand times,” exclaimed the youthful Queen, and hastily writing *Pardoned* in large letters on the fatal page, she sent it across the table with a hand trembling with eagerness and beautiful emotion.” —[Hodgin's Anecdotes of the Queen and the Royal Family].