

MAJOR RAMSAY'S LECTURE.

At the request the officers of the No. 1 Troop of Volunteer Cavalry, Major Ramsay delivered a lecture on Cavalry tactics at the Mechanics' Hall, on Monday evening. The Hall was well filled—chiefly by the officers and men of the Volunteer Force. Col. Dyde, commanding the Brigade, occupied the chair, and after a few words of introduction explaining the purpose and object of the lecture, gave place to Major Ramsay. We have only space to day for a part of the interesting discourse; but the remainder will be given hereafter. The lecturer said:—

Mr Chairman and Gentlemen,—What strikes one perhaps most, reviewing the history of Cavalry, is the extreme brilliancy of its victories at one time, compared to its comparative nullity or inefficiency at others. But it must be recollected that it is the most difficult arm to bring to a state of perfection; it requires the highest degree of courage and discipline, and a talent and heroism in its leaders, not always to be met with.

If cavalry has in some actions, nay during whole campaigns, only performed a very second rate part, it is at the same time undeniable, that to charges of this arm, when conducted by leaders possessing the necessary energy and spirit, the most decisive successes must be attributed.

If, however, we consider the numerous occasions on which cavalry, from not being properly led, or from not having attained a proper state of efficiency, has failed in producing great results; and if we consider at the same time the great expense of maintaining this arm of the service, it is, perhaps, not to be wondered at that cavalry should at many periods have been much neglected. It is the greatest commanders, nevertheless, both in ancient and modern times, that have paid cavalry the greatest attention, well knowing what masses of horse could do when wielded by the hand of genius.

It is far from my intention to place cavalry above infantry; it is the latter, which, acting in much greater numbers, that has, in most cases, to stand the brunt of the battle. And is, veritably, the mainstay of the army. Cavalry cannot act on the defensive—or rather I should say, its only means of defence consists in a vigorous attack; unsupported by infantry it is utterly unable to hold a position. If, however, in war it is infantry which combats in the greatest masses; if on the field of battle it is generally infantry which plays the principal part—it is, at all events, decisive. Without cavalry, the enemy is never really beaten, but retreats in good order, take up a new position, and is soon in readiness to renew the combat.

At Alma, it was owing to the absence of a sufficient force of cavalry on the side of the Allies, that the Russians were enabled to make good their retreat with comparatively little loss, carrying away with them nearly all their artillery. The total destruction of the French army after the battle of Waterloo, was owing to the vigorous pursuit made by bodies of Prussian cavalry, eager to avenge the many defeats they had suffered.

It is, gentlemen, ignorance alone of military history which induces one arm to despise another. An acquaintance with the annals of warfare shows that great commanders—such men as Alexander, Cæsar, Hannibal—and in modern times, Marlborough, Frederick the Great, Napoleon, Wellington, and many others—have known how to draw the greatest advantage from a judicious employment of these different arms. How very unreasonable it would be to decry artillery, cause on a retreat it is generally more cumbersome than useful; to despise cavalry, because it is not generally of much service during a siege; or to look reproachfully down upon infantry, because it cannot reach the decisive point, or fall upon the enemy's flank with the same destructive velocity as cavalry. Why, gentlemen, a carpenter might as well despise a bricklayer because he is not skilful in the use of the plane; or the bricklayer the carpenter, for not knowing how to lay bricks; or the plasterer assume an air of superiority over both, because his aid is necessary to the completion of the building.

Did the limited length of a lecture admit of it I should gladly have spoken of some of the great cavalry achievements of ancient times; but as the length of a lecture only admits of my referring to a very few examples, I prefer citing some of the most recent. I have two reasons for making this choice; first,—that examples taken from modern his-

tory are clearer, especially as regards the minutest details, often of much importance; and secondly,—that by taking instances of a recent date there is a greater similarity with the warlike means actually in use.—As I remarked a little while ago, the strength of cavalry consists in a vigorous attack: it should never await the assailant, but should always anticipate offensive measures, by a bold and dashing charge. As an example of the fatal effects of cavalry awaiting a charge I shall cite an instance given by Colonel Beamish, in his commentary on the uses of cavalry in war.

During Sir John Moore's famous retreat to Corunna, the fatigue undergone by the troops of all arms, but especially by the cavalry, was immense; for in such circumstances as these it is on the courage and vigilance of the cavalry at the outposts and rearguard that the safety of the army depends. The British had crossed the Esla, and orders were received by the Hussars of the King's German Legion, which formed the rear guard, and was much fatigued, to unsaddle and put up their horses for the night. Fortunately, however, Major Von Linsingen took upon himself to modify this order. At day break 500 French Chasseurs were observed fording the river, which they were obliged to do, by swimming their horses across, the English having destroyed the bridge. Col. Otway, who was on the spot, determined, with 60 dragoons of the outlying piquet, to arrest the advance of the hostile cavalry, and so to prevent a surprise; he accordingly took up a position where the mud walls of some gardens afforded protection to his flanks; there, he was joined by 60 men of the inlying piquet, and thus reinforced, he quietly awaited, in this position the approach of the Chasseur. Col. Otway having observed that one squadron had halted, considerably in advance of the rest, resolved to take advantage of this disposition by charging the body thus advanced. The French squadron awaited the charge, and was completely routed; the officer commanding it being killed on the spot; but the rear squadrons coming up, the British were obliged to retire to their former position. Again reinforced by about three troops, another attack was made; the French again awaited the charge, but owing to the deep, clayey nature of the ground the allied cavalry had to pass through, they did not make the same impression as on the former occasion; great havoc however, was done by the British sabres, and the two cavalries becoming intermixed, scene of the desperate individual conflict ensued. However, owing to the foresight of Major Von Linsingen, reinforcements were continually arriving from the British rear-guard, and soon, Lord Paget, who commanded the English cavalry, arrived on the ground, re-formed the squadrons, and drove the French into the river; and here many of them became easy marks to the carabines of their pursuers. Arrived on the opposite bank, the French horsemen wheeled bravely about, and succeeded in wounding some men by firing across the river; but, meantime, two pieces of British horse artillery had unlimbered close to the bank, and the first shot falling in the midst of those who had rallied, soon decided their retreat.

I shall now, gentlemen, call your attention to a remarkable instance, where a great battle was decided by a small body of cavalry, commanded by an able leader, who knew how to strike at the decisive moment. Many of you are well aware how important to the fate of the world was the famous battle of Marengo, which, gained by the French after a long and doubtful struggle, secured Napoleon on the consular throne he had so recently mounted, and thus placed in his hands the absolute control of the whole military resources of the French people, so necessary to the carrying out of his daring scheme of universal dominion.

In the early part of the day, after a desperate struggle, success seemed about to crown the Austrian arms—victory, indeed, appeared certain. The French squares were broken, the plain covered with fugitives, and the cry of "*tout est perdu! sauve qui peut!*" was heard on all sides from the French ranks. At this moment, General Desaix, with 6,000 men, arrived on the scene of action; but although the Austrian advance was thus somewhat checked, the reinforcement seemed still insufficient to change the fate of the day. General Desaix received a wound, while leading on his men, which brought him to the ground, and the Austrian column continued

to advance. At this critical juncture the aspect of affairs was completely changed by a charge of French cavalry. A body of Cuirassiers, 800 strong, under the command of General Kellerman, were stationed in an orchard, beyond which the Austrian column had advanced, thus exposing its flank to the French cavalry, concealed by the festoons of vine leaves, which hung from the branches of the trees. Kellerman perceived his advantage, and at the decisive moment dashed forward, making a vigorous charge on the flank of the Austrian grenadiers; pierced the column in two, the sabres of the cuirassiers making at the same time havoc among the crowded ranks of the Austrians; till, at length, pressed on all sides, the Austrian General Zach, and 2,000 grenadiers, were obliged to lay down their arms and yield themselves prisoners.

The head of the column thus cut off, Zach a prisoner, despair seized the ranks of the Austrians. There was no one left to direct; as Melas, General-in-Chief, had retired to Alexandria to despatch to his sovereign the earliest news of the supposed victory, which Kellerman and his cuirassiers so suddenly changed into a disastrous defeat. General Melas might well regret that he had, a short time before, sent away 2,000 dragoons to protect the rear of his army against a body of French, much too distant from the scene of action to have come up during the battle. Two thousand five hundred dragoons, thus held aloof, if brought on the scene of action, would have decided the day in favor of the Austrians. Alison pretends that the favor conferred, on this occasion, by Kellerman on Napoleon, was too great to be acknowledged. Kellerman, by his charge of cavalry, had secured Napoleon's throne, and thus changed the fate of Europe. The learned historian relates that when Kellerman was presented to the First Consul after the battle, the latter coolly remarked, "You have made a pretty good charge this evening"; then turning to one of the officers present, he said, "The Guard has covered itself with glory." "I am glad you are pleased," replied Kellerman, with military frankness, "for it has placed the crown on your head." Kellerman was promoted, like the other Generals, but received no special mark of favor.

After the rupture of the peace of Amiens, in 1805, Napoleon had nearly the whole of Europe in arms against him. Austria, Russia, England, Hanover, Sweden, Naples, set armies in motion amounting to half a million of men. In the North, a Russian army, 16,000 strong, was being formed at Revel, to be transported by sea to Stralsund, there to be joined by an army of 12,000 Swedes. From thence, the united Russian and Swedish army was to march to Mecklenburgh, and was there to be still further reinforced by 16,000 English troops, disembarked by way of the Elbe. A Russian force was being organized at Wilna; the Emperor Alexander in person commanded another army on the Vistula, which, it was hoped, would draw Prussia, still neutral, into the coalition. Another Russian army, under General Kutusof, was marching by way of Galicia into Moravia; and, by following the valley of the Danube was to arrive in time to support. General Mack, who had imprudently advanced to Ulm, where he occupied an encamped position of great strength, its front resting on a small stream called the Iller, and still further protected on the same side by the Swabian Alps and the Black Forest; and on either flank by the Danube and the Mountains of Tyrol: a position which, however impregnable it appeared, was, as the event proved, capable of being turned.

One hundred thousand Austrians, commanded by the Archduke Charles, were in Italy; and the passes of the Tyrol were guarded by 25,000 Austrians, commanded by the archduke John. These were indeed formidable preparations, but the allies had yet to learn the value of time in war.

"Trust to me," said Napoleon to one of his highest officers of State, Cambaceres, "trust to my activity: I will surprise the world by the rapidity of my strokes." We shall see how Napoleon carried these words into effect.

Two armies of 20,000 men each, one of them stationed in Holland and the other occupying Hanover, received orders to march to the south by different routes towards the Danube; injunctions to march rapidly across France from west to east, were also dispatched to the army which for two years had been held in readiness at Boulogne, and at

other places along the coast of the British Channel, for the projected descent on England. Such was at this time the high state of discipline and fine condition of the French armies, and the absolute power exercised by Napoleon over the whole resources of the country, that these plans, conceived by his extraordinary genius, were carried into execution with the promptitude and secrecy truly wonderful, and with such exactness, that these various armies, converging from remote districts, reached the points indicated with the utmost precision; and to the great surprise of all Europe, and the utter consternation of General Mack, 168,000 French soldiers suddenly appeared on the banks of the Danube, and in rear of the Austrian position at Ulm; while the Russian and Austrian armies, marching to his support, were still hundreds of miles distant.

It would be wrong, however, to suppose that this bold stroke of Napoleon was unaccompanied with danger.

Napoleon had, previous to this, made a new division of his forces; leaving to each corps d'armée a body of horse no more than sufficient for its actual wants; he had formed the great body of his cavalry, that is 22,000 out of 38,000 sabres, into a separate corps of reserve which he placed under the command of his brother-in-law, Prince Murat. The most dangerous duty devolved on the cavalry under Murat, that of protecting the extreme right of the French army, which had to pass transversely along the front of the defiles, which communicated across the black Forest, from the right of the French line of march to the Iller, the French cavalry succeeded on concealing from the observation the Austrians the immense hosts which were, by rapid marches, converging towards their rear; and by cutting off reports which might otherwise have reached the Austrian headquarters, and by circulating instead false rumors, succeeded in completely bewildering General Mack as to the plans and intentions of Napoleon.

During this anxious march, Murat was constantly on horseback, galloping at the head of his cavalry; in case, despite all this vigilance, the Austrians should become apprised of what was passing, and issue forth in overpowering numbers from the defiles of the Black Forest, Napoleon was ever ready with the Imperial Guard, and the corps of Lannes and Ney—that is, with 50,000 men from the centre, to fly to the support of the right. Another danger to the success of Napoleon's schemes was, that the Austrians should take the alarm, and escape before they were completely enveloped by his forces. Soon however, the extreme left of the French army—that is Bernadotte's corps—had crossed the Danube, and reached Wurtzburg where the presence of so large a body of troops, at once, decided the Elector of Bavaria, who had at his command an army of 25,000 men, and arsenals well filled with military stores to declare in favor of the French. The auxiliary force raised Napoleon's army to nearly 200,000 men. Before, however, this mighty host had completely cut off the retreat of the Austrians, several sharp cavalry engagements took place, especially at Wurttemberg. As Lannes and Murat were passing through an undulating and woody country, intersected by small streams, the dragoons marching at the head of the column—a numerous body of the enemy were perceived, posted round a considerable town called Wurttemberg. It consisted of 6 battalions of grenadiers, 3 battalions of fusiliers, and 4 squadrons of cavalry, sent forward to reconnoitre by General Mack, who had begun to receive alarming reports that a great French army was actually on the banks of the Danube. In front of the town of Wurttemberg was situated the hamlet of Hohenreithen, guarded by several hundred Austrian infantry and cavalry. Protected by the houses of the hamlet, these troops commenced a galling fire on a regiment of dragoons which had reached the scene of action. Cavalry, unsupported by infantry or artillery, is not exactly the sort at force to assail troops placed behind stone walls; but one of Murat's aide-de-camps, an officer of cavalry, named Excelmans, had just come up, and immediately devised a scheme by which to overcome the difficulty. He caused 200 dragoons, armed with carbines, who volunteered for the service, to dismount, and placing himself at their head soon drove the enemy from the