

## CORRESPONDENCE.

## NOTES AND QUERIES.

BY G. W.

Are not charges of Horse Guards' red-tapism bore out by the information contained in your Brockville correspondent's letter of 15th February, as to the frivolities practised by "the Duke," while principles of so much greater importance demand his utmost attention? Fancy a man setting to work in these days to spoil the simplicity of marching past in quick time, the only march past which ought to have place in the Red Book at all. It is time that as many of these mere Parade-shows should be dispensed with as possible.

The formation of lines of contiguous columns with greater intervals, with a subdivision on each flank for extension in skirmishing order when near the enemy, is an innovation of quite another character, and deserves attention. There is traceable in it an analogy to that combination for attack which Jomini considered the best—he had ever seen (Col. Hamley p. 322) and in which the union of fire and shock is such as he conceived no troops could withstand. It is described as that of two lines of Battalions formed in double columns of companies on the centre—"Advancing thus: the first line, on approaching sufficiently near for effective fire, deploys each of its Battalions, throwing out the two flank companies as skirmishers. This leaves, opposite the columns of the second line, intervals equal to their fronts; through which, as soon as the fire of the first line, shall have produced sufficient effect, they advance to the charge."

It is premised, however, that this appears to have been executed before the veteran at a Review; not in actual conflict.

## THE REVOLVER VS. THE SABRE.

To the Editor of THE VOLUNTEER REVIEW.

DEAR SIR,—Seeing that your columns are generally filled with more interesting matter than a discussion rapidly degenerating into tedious reiteration, I have deferred forwarding this letter, in answer to Col. Denison's of the 1st ult., but as it will be my last infliction upon the Review, perhaps the delay is excusable.

Col. Denison admits "That the Sabre and Lance will generally be the best arms, although not the most deadly," when Cavalry charge *en masse*. This admission virtually invests the sword with the dominion claimed for it,—the best line of battle weapon for Cavalry. And should the revolver find its peculiar province in the melee that may, or may not follow the grand attack, and "reap the relics of the field," it naturally enough subsides into an auxiliary weapon. But even under the conditions of group fighting, the particular arms brought into play will be controlled by the ever fitting exigencies of the moment, and intelligence of the com-

batants. The duration of such affairs are necessarily brief. Discipline quickly asserting its sway, by the most plastic squadrons being the first to re-form, and the probability is, secure victory, in taking the initiative in a renewed attack. Every officer is cognizant of this—hence the evanescent nature of the melee. And upon the whole it may be argued that the influence of the charge *en masse* upon general results, as compared with that of the desultory recounter, should best classify the weapons in dispute.

Col. Denison's able summary of American cavalry achievements fails to show that they emulated the exploits of that arm in the military organization of other countries. Nor can a fair apology be found for their failing to control, in some degree, the issue of general actions, in the nature of the ground. A line of country frequently subject to the devastating sweep of contending hosts, is quickly cleared of artificial impediments—natural ones may be avoided, or ignored. And in a war notorious for straggling marches, badly protected flanks, and worse conducted retreats, ample opportunity for cavalry to strike effectually must have occurred to more than counterbalance any difficulties the ground might present. But the failure of such cavalry to revive a Marengo, a Hohenlinden, or to ride as rode the six hundred, is not imputed to a deficiency in manly courage, or to any ineffectiveness in the weapons of their choice, but simply to that lack of discipline which made a fair trial of the sword impossible: and at the same time indicates that the peculiar tactics of such levies could be no proper criterion for regular troops. But no bad criterion for gallantry may be safely deduced from the dauntless front the few presented to the many, and no solicitude to enforce a dogma should be permitted to obscure a reputation solely due to the unflinching bravery of the men, and devoted intrepidity of their officers. To impute the frequent success of the confederates to even the redoubted revolver, is as unjust as it is untenable—their antagonists being much better supplied with that weapon. And I may be allowed to remark *en passant* that Colonel Denison should be rather commended than censured for deductively preferring Confederate experience.

There may be nothing to object to Colonel Denison's persistency in degrading combat with the sabre to mere *des coups baton*, but when he extends his detraction of the weapon to the impeachment of its votaries gallantry and courage, it is evident that however true the accusation, the courtesy is at least questionable.

Col Denison begs the question with reference to the undeniable high *morale* of the sabreur. "Can this not be accounted for by the fact that the swordsman has appreciated the want of deadliness in the weapon in the hands of his opponent." This suggestion, insinuation, or perhaps theory boldly invests the most daring feats of the old Cav-

alryman with the vapouring gasconade characteristic of the bully, and sends the brave fellows of the past—"careering through battle fields"—in confident immunity from danger, because, it is presumed, there were no revolvers to intimidate them. But I refrain from tracing—what can only be some strange inadvertency on Col. Denison's part—to its full significancy; Col. Denison will at once perceive the catholicism of the principle it involves.

Col. Denison cannot seriously believe that I argue the possibility or utility of modern warfare again donning sword and buckler, the accusation of so doing carries its refutation in the absurdity of the idea.

It must be evident that this discussion, in its unwarrantable discursiveness, has miserably strayed from its text; the question was not which of the weapons referred to was, *per se*, the most efficient, but which of them would best combine with the horse's momentum. Now it is obvious that whatever be urged in favor of either weapon may—considering the transient aspect everything pertaining to war is daily assuming—be equally inapplicable to the future conditions of that art; I shall therefore confine myself to what, ethically viewed, appears under our present phase neither strained nor unnatural.

In the event of future Cavalry combats being principally decided by fire arms, the best marksman should be the most efficient soldier, and why that man should, or be expected to, neutralize his skill as a shot, by rushing at any enemy when, perhaps, his fire would be quite as effectual at some fifteen or twenty paces off, is a requirement that may stagger the dream of even a trooper's philosophy. To encourage the use of, and dependence upon a weapon, to the use of which the impetuosity, crash, and confusion of the charge is unnecessary, if not unfavorable, is rather to ignore than to utilize the horse's powers. Some approximation to this is the ethics of the pistol. What they practically taught has been illustrated in the tactics of American cavalry. Horsemen galloped to a convenient distance of each other, wheeling, circling, advancing, or retiring, as the case might be, and delivering their fire, no doubt with destructive enough effect, but certainly not utilizing the horse's momentum. On the other hand make the horseman a perfect swordsman—a real one feels the hilt-grasp send a thrill of confidence through his every fibre)—let him become imbued with something of the real Dragoon's creed—to ride at, through, or over everything, and without arrogating the hero, he will instinctively demand the most demoralizing of all tactics to an enemy—close combat—these combining the generous ardour of the horse with his own efforts.

In conclusion, I beg to thank Col. Denison for his appreciation of what he is pleased to term my Cavalry spirit, and to assure him that in whatever degree I may possess it, it