

THE BRITISH ARMY.

ON THE BRAVERY OF THE ENGLISH COMMON SOLDIERS BY
DR. JOHNSON.

By those who have compared the military genius of the English with that of the French nation, it is remarked, that *the French officers will always lead if the soldiers will follow; and that the English soldiers will always follow, if their officers will lead.*

In all pointed sentences some degree of accuracy must be sacrificed to conciseness; and in this comparison our officers seem to lose what our soldiers gain. I know not any reason for supposing that the English officers are less willing than the French to lead; but it is I think universally allowed, that the English soldiers are more willing to follow. Our nation may boast, beyond any other people in the world, of a kind of epidemic bravery diffused equally through all its ranks. We can shew a peasantry of heroes, and fill our armies with clowns, whose courage may vie with that of their general.

There may be some pleasure in tracing the causes of this plebeian magnanimity. The qualities which commonly make an army formidable, are long habits of regularity, great exactness of discipline, and great confidence in the commander. Regularity may in time produce a kind of mechanical obedience to signals and commands, like that which the perverse Cartesians impute to animals; discipline may impress such an awe upon the mind, that any danger shall be less dreaded than the danger of punishment; and confidence in the wisdom or fortune of the general, may induce the soldiers to follow him blindly to the most dangerous enterprise.

What may be done by discipline and regularity, may be seen in the troops of the Prussian monarchs. We find that they may be broken without confusion, and repulsed without flight.

But the English troops have none of these requisites in any eminent degree. Regularity is by no means part of their character; they are rarely exercised, and therefore show very little dexterity in their evolutions as bodies of men, or in the manual use of their weapons as individuals; they neither are thought by others, nor by themselves, more active or exact than their enemies, and therefore derive none of their courage from such imaginary superiority.

The manner in which they are dispersed in quarters over the country during times of peace, naturally produces laxity of discipline; they are very little in sight of their officers; and when they are not engaged in the slight duty of the guard, are suffered to live every man his own way.

The equality of English privileges, the impartiality of our laws, the freedom of our tenures, and the prosperity of our trade, dispose us very little to the reverence of superiors. It is not to any great esteem of the officers that the English soldier is indebted for his spirit in the hour of battle; for perhaps it does not often happen that he thinks much better of his leader than of himself. A French author remarks how much soldiers are animated when they see all their dangers shared by those who were born to be their masters, and whom they consider as beings of a different rank. The Englishman despises such motives of courage; he was born without a master, and looks not on any man, however dignified by lace or titles, as deriving from nature any claims to his respect, or inheriting any qualities superior to his own.

There are some, perhaps, who would imagine that every Englishman fights better than the subjects of absolute governments, because he has more to defend. But what has the English more than French soldier? Property they are both commonly without. Liberty is, to the lowest rank of every nation, little more than the choice of working or starving; and this choice is, I suppose, equally allowed in every country. The English soldier seldom has his head

very full of the constitution; nor has there been for more than a century any war that put the property or liberty of a single Englishman in danger.

Whence then is the courage of the English vulgar? It proceeds in my opinion from that dissolution of dependence which obliges every man to regard his own character. While every man is fed by his own hands, he has no need of any servile arts; he may always have wages for his labour; and is no less necessary to his employer than his employer is to him. While he looks for no protection from others, he is naturally roused to be his own protector; and having nothing to abate his esteem of himself, he consequently aspires to the esteem of others. Thus every man that crowds our streets is a man of honour, disdainful of obligation, impatient of reproach, and desirous of extending his reputation, among those of his own rank; and as courage is in most frequent use, the fame of courage is most eagerly pursued. From this neglect of subordination, I do not deny that some inconveniences may from time to time proceed; the power of the law does not always sufficiently supply the want of reverence, or maintain the proper distinction between different ranks; but good and evil will grow up in this world together, and they who complain in peace of the insolence of the populace, must remember, that their insolence in peace is bravery in war.

THE LABOUR COMMISSION.

[So many members of our society are workingmen that no apology is needed for noticing the proceedings of the Commission in these columns.]

The recent disclosures in Montreal furnish a signal proof not only of the usefulness of the Commission, without whose investigations the frauds and cruelties practiced on the young cigar workers would never have been revealed, but of the need of a strict permanent system of government supervision of all workshops in which women or youths are employed. Against apprenticeship as a system, it yields no argument whatever. The cruelties which Fortier admits having practiced were equally illegal, whether indentured apprentices or boys and girls working at current wages were the victims. It is true that the English common law permits a master to administer such moderate correction to an apprentice as a judicious parent would practice in his family. But no judicious parent would throw a grown up daughter of 18 across his knee or knock her down with a block of wood, nor would he lock up his boys in a "sweating" room or strike them on the head with any tool that came handy. A judicious parent practising such a vigorous system of discipline on his sons and daughters would certainly, if it became known, speedily find himself inside the four walls of a gaol, even if he escaped testimonial to his parental qualities from his neighbours in the shape of a brand new suit of tar and feathers, or a triumphal ride on the edge of a rail, followed by a cool and refreshing bath in the nearest mud-hole. How Mr. Fortier and his amiable foreman avoided attentions of this kind is a mystery, and shows a lamentable indifference to distinguished merit among the working people of Montreal. It is to be hoped that these revelations may at least result in the introduction of these two gentlemen to the police magistrate of Montreal, by whom merit of this kind is always properly appreciated and rewarded.

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The fining of employees is one on which a good deal of evidence has been taken. It is practiced in most trades, and perhaps cannot be entirely dispensed with. When levied by mutual agreement on a scale that will merely reimburse the employer for losses incurred by the workman's carelessness or idleness, there can be no reasonable objection to the system. But that in many factories every pretext has