

Mess Room Stories.

[Broad-Arrow.]

It is a guest night at the old 'Smashers,' the 'Mashers' are dining with them, and the 'Crashers,' who are in the same garrison have sent some of their most festive members to do honour to the occasion. The 'Queen's health' has been drunk, and the tongues are generally loosened. It should be observed that the 'Mashers' and 'Smashers' have served together in India, whilst the 'Smashers' and 'Crashers' have been together at the Cape. It is usually said that men who have been at the Cape are inclined to draw the long bow with regard to their exploits, whilst the exaggerations of those who have served both in India and at the Cape pass all bounds. Consequently what between the wine and the good fellowship and a natural desire to promote the conviviality of the meeting, the stories got a little 'tail.'

The conversation, like that of Othello, naturally turns on "stirring incidents by flood and field." Campaigning is mentioned, and the colonel observes on modern luxuries—jams, tinned meats, turtle soup, and so forth. "Ha," says he, "you young fellows are spoilt nowadays; when I was a subaltern in the Mutiny my bearer brought me an omelette he had made for the breakfast, devilish glad to get it, gave him a rupee at once, didn't ask where he got the eggs, ate it, though it tasted odd, asked about eggs, scoundrel confessed they were vultures' eggs. Held on to it however, but have never eaten another omelette since."

A "Smasher" takes up the ball, and relates how he was shooting in China, with a favourite pointer, and lost his way, and how he had to spend the night in a jungle, and how he would have starved if a happy thought had not occurred to him. He cut off his dog's tail, cooked and ate it, and gave the bones to the owner, and so saved both their lives. The conversation shifts to reptiles, and the unpleasantness of cobras is descanted on.

A "Crasher" relates how he was lying in his bungalow, half asleep on his charpoy, with a hokah beside him at which he took an occasional pull, and how putting his hand to the ground, he took up the tube of the hokah and put it to his mouth without opening his eyes. "By jove," says he, "found it wouldn't draw a bit, suddenly felt it wriggle, opened my eyes, found I had got the tail of a cobra in my mouth, and the remainder of him on the ground, d——d angry, with his blood up." This story creates considerable impression, especially among the youngsters who have never been to India. Hereupon another, not to be outdone, relates how he was chased at Natal by an imambo for two miles; how the animal like our periods of prosperity described by Mr. Gladstone, advanced with leaps and bounds, and that he barely escaped with his life.

There is a general agreement that the Cape stations nowadays are beastly places, sport all done for, but the older officers who have known it years ago talk of the days when shooting was first-class and one relates how he went shooting with John Dunn in the Zulu country. He tells a story how he had wounded a buffalo, and was spooring it through scattered bush, when all of a sudden it emerged with a bellow from behind a bush where it had been lying in wait for him, and before he had time to turn and fire caught him full in the stern and tossed him clean on top of a 'Cameel Dorn,' whose thorns are six inches long and as strong and as sharp as packing needles. The Capers here get good innings, and one relates how he stalked 'pauw,' On one occasion he had stalked two pauws, and was very near them, behind a piece of 'speck-boem,' they suddenly rose and flew close over his head. He covered the leading bird but did not fire as it was so close, and he goes on to relate how it suddenly fell down dead at his feet with funk, and how he promptly shot the other. Pauws, introduce ostriches, and another Caper relates how his regiment kept a cock ostrich which used to march in front of the band, and how this interesting bird swallowed everything that it could lay its bill to—'didn't he put his head into the canteen window one day and swallow all the bagettele balls, and he was never a penny the worst—must have digested them, because they were never seen again.' There is a silence for a while after this, and all take a drink so as to get the bagettele balls down like the ostrich.

The conversation shifts to fishing, and the Indian heroes; who have been rather extinguished by the Cape men, now get a turn. They have been discussing the respective merits of the Shannon and the Tweed, and the size of the salmon in these rivers. "Well," says an ardent disciple of the gentle art, "salmon fishing is all very well, but its nothing to mah-seer fishing. I had some excellent fishing at a place on the Jhelum, and we never caught anything under 60 lbs. We tried 'em at first with our biggest salmon flies, and they wouldn't look at them. But one day we saw them rising at the swallows under a bridge as they picked the gnats of the water. So what did we do but shoot some of the swallows and put them on our largest salmon hooks, and used them as flies—threw 'em easily with a twenty-foot rod—grand sport we had, the fish rose to 'em splendidly."

There is a general agreement that there is no place like India now for the British officer for sport and general fun. It has its objections, of course—hot weather, early parades, insects, smells, etc. "What rum 'uns the adjutants are," says a young fellow. "There was one walking about our parade ground, and I had in my hands a largish sized kitten which I had picked up near the cook-house, and as the adjutant came near me I chucked the kitten towards it, when, would you believe it, the adjutant gravely took a step forward and swallowed the kitten whole? Wouldn't have believed it unless I had seen it." The company, like the Duke of Wellington, reserved the same right to themselves.

This lets in another man's most veracious story, which is how they kill sharks in the West Indies. They heat a stone red-hot, and then wrap it up in an old blanket and throw it into the sea when sharks are about. Of course a shark swallows it at once, and at first he likes it, but after a while the stone burns through the blanket and begins on the shark's inside. Isn't there a commotion then! At last the stone burns its way clean through the sharks inside, and he comes to the surface dead. "Often seen it done," he adds. The company then begins to abuse Mr. Gladstone, who is credited with having given up all the good stations formerly occupied by the British Army—Canada, Corfu, &c.

Ah, what a quarter Canada was! Moose calling. Salmon as thick as minnows in the rivers! But the mosquitoes and flies! A man who has been quartered in Canada takes the opportunity of relating how he was shooting in the Backwoods, and that coming one morning early to a settler's clearing he saw a tall stout man coming down the wide garden path towards him; how the man got leisurely over the stile, and he did not find out until he got close to him that the apparent man was a "grizzly," with a punkin under each arm and one in his mouth. With such stories our friends enliven the evening, and there is a sort of tacit agreement of "You swallow my story and I'll swallow yours." Such are mess-room stories, travellers' tales in fact, for if we take all the officers of a mixed company sitting around a mess-table we shall find hardly a place on the globe that some one present has not been to. This practical experience of the world is in itself a liberal education, and an advantage such as no other army in the world possess.

Gleanings.

General Lord Wolseley, of the British Army, received recently an invitation from all five of the Australian Provincial Governments and those of Tasmania and New Zealand to visit them during the coming summer as a public guest and inspect and advise them in the matter of the projected system of defence.

M. De Freycinet, Minister of War in the new French Cabinet, will allow the War Department to retain an exclusively military character, and will refer to a special secretaryship all civil and Parliamentary questions. He has sent a circular to all the army corps commanders asking them to maintain an absolute respect for discipline among all ranks.

The hostility shown by the Italians for everything French increases every day in ridiculous proportions. The Italians go around saying that in the next war France "will be beaten out of her boots." The Italian press has been let loose, and the soldiery are much excited against the French, without there being the least cause to explain this access of Galliphobia.

A committee, consisting of Gen. Von Rosenberg, Col. Count Von Wedel and Lieut.-Col. Von Langenbeck, has recommended the disuse of the cuirass in the German Cavalry. Experiments made, says the *Deutsche Heeres-Zeitung*, with the Lebel rifle have shown that it has no value as a defence, while the wearer's wound would be aggravated by broken pieces of the plate driven into the flesh.

One effect of the late Emperor's death, says a London correspondent, is that fully 30,000 of the Germans resident in England who evaded the conscription and the call to arms on the breaking out of the Franco-Prussian war will be now free to visit the Fatherland without incurring the risk of being tried by Court-martial as deserters, as their offence is only coeval with the late Emperor's reign.

Dr. Herrenstein, a well-known authority in Russia, in a lecture at St. Petersburg regarding the physical condition of the Russian conscript, said that of the two million conscripts medically examined between 1873 and 1884, 34 per cent. were rejected. This percentage is less than that of other States, owing to the Russian rulers being less exacting. An application of the regulations of the Austria-Hungarian service would increase it nearly one-half. In regard to minimum height, the Russian and the French conscript is about equal, namely 5 feet, while in most other European countries the minimum stature ranges from 5 ft. 1. in. to 5 ft. 1. in. 3. Another point in favour of the physique and general health of the Russian soldier is, that the numbers eligible for conscription each year in Russia are 800,000—whereas in Germany they are but 415,000, in Austria-Hungary and France about 300,000, and in Italy only 200,000.

The Quick Ordnance Company appear to have had a short preliminary trial of their gun, March 23, principally, as it appears, to test a new batch of their cake powder just supplied by Messrs. Curtis and Harvey, and to try the carriage recently completed by Messrs. Easton and Anderson on their "storage recoil" principle. A velocity of 2,300 feet, 1. v., was obtained, and subsequently 1,700 feet, 1. v., with a smaller powder charge enclosed in the usual serge bag, which had been soaked for nearly an hour, and was put into the gun in this state. The breech was closed in one movement and also as easily opened by one man in a single movement, and the obturation by means of Fleet Engineer Quick's rig was perfect. The trial was only a short private one for the company's satisfaction, but we understand that a full experiment in firing will take place at Erith shortly, when fine weather instead of the drizzling rain experienced last week, is hoped for.—*Broad Arrow*.