

OUR SERVICE CONTEMPORARIES.

Portugal desires to extend her ship-building industry and economise her naval expenditure, and, like some other nations, would like a firm of experience abroad to take a new yard under its supervision, just as Sir Charles Palmer brought into successful operation the great establishment at Bilbao. It has just been decided to construct a new Navy of 23-knot protective cruisers, wood and copper sheathed, like the Japanese cruiser *Yoskimo*; of 28-knot torpedo-boat destroyers; 23-knot torpedo-boats; of river gun-boats and vedette-boats. The government propose to pay about £111,111 annually for a period of twenty years, and instead of giving the work out to contract intend to invite a shipbuilder of Great Britain, France, Germany, and the United States to state how many vessels of the type indicated he will supply for the money on certain conditions. He must make a yard at Lisbon, and he will get the machinery of the existing government factory, and their staff of officers and mechanics will be able to import plant, material, and fuel free of duty, will have sole right of shipbuilding and repairing in Portugal and her colonies, and at the end of twenty years will have the privilege of handing over the yard to the state.

It is stated in several papers that "all the 'improved magazine rifles' which have been submitted to the authorities since the Lee-Metford was adopted have been rejected. The latest, which was submitted some weeks ago, was declared to be entirely too complicated in its character, and to possess no superiority whatever over the British weapon. It shows, however, what a remarkable competitive spirit has been inspired by the Lee-Metford rifle that about a dozen weapons have been submitted in about as many months to the War Office." This reads funnily after the burst of indignant wrath with which the *Times* and most other English journals treated the news of the adoption of Lee Metford. As we pointed out at the time it was only fair that time should be allowed for the newly-adopted weapon to be fully tested, as the Martini Henry was. But the knowing ones could not be persuaded of any merit at all in the rifle; it was bad, they said, in principle, in construction, in accuracy, in everything. It is as well that the lesson should be taken to heart, for it has been proved to be nothing like so bad as it was painted. It may not be perfect—what military weapon ever is? But at least this can be said of it, that hitherto it has held its own fairly well, and has not been run off the field by any competitor, though the number of "improvements" has been legion.

The Siberian official journal *Promurskii Vedomosti*, published at Khabarovsk, the seat of the Amur district government, has published some interesting details concerning efforts made last winter to keep open the port of Vladivostok. The idea was to maintain an ice-free

channel that ships could enter and leave the harbour. Early in December, 1893, the steamship *Silatch* began her work as an ice-breaker, but the ice thickened from seven inches in that month to thirty-two inches at the end of January, 1894, and the *Silatch* proved unequal to the task. Small mines or explosive charges were then used to assist her, and the channel was kept free from thick ice until the end of February. On the 27th of that month the steamship *Baikal*, and on March 1 the *Vladimir*, entered the harbour from the sea. Although the *Silatch* failed to accomplish as much as was hoped, the four months' seclusion of Vladivostok was abridged to fifty days. This was thought most satisfactory, and it is believed that two or three stronger and properly constituted ice-breakers will suffice to keep the port open through the whole winter. It is announced that the Volunteer Fleet will begin running ships between Odessa and Vladivostok unusually early next year, and instead of four or five being sent, as formerly, with troops, guns, ammunition, and other warlike material, it is understood that ten cruisers will be required. During the autumn six more voyages will be made, and it is believed that at least 10,000 men will be conveyed to that part of Asiatic Russia.

The manning and armament of the two new cruisers *Powerful* and *Terrible* has now been definitely decided upon by the Admiralty. Each will carry a crew of 894 officers and men—a number considerably in excess of that of any battle-ship afloat. Vessels of the Royal Sovereign type, the largest ships afloat, carry a complement of 730 officers and men. The armament will consist of two 9.2-inch breech loading guns, twelve 6-in quick-firing, sixteen 12 pounder 12 cwt. guns, one 12-pounder 8 cwt. boat's gun, one 12-pounder 8-cwt. field service gun, twelve 3 pounder Hotchkiss quick firing guns, and nine Maxim machine-guns. There will also be supplied twenty Whitehead torpedoes for use with submerged tubes, four of which will be built into each vessel. It is not expected that these vessels will be ready for sea for three years.

A soldier returning from a ramble in the country entered a wayside store to purchase tobacco. While serving the soldier, the storekeeper observed his attention directed to a box of red herrings on the counter. Being fond of a joke, he thought to excite a laugh at the dough-boy's expense, and remarked: "Ah, I see you have recognized your comrades. We call them soldiers." "Do you?" replied the doughboy; "then I shall take those fellows up for deserters," and before the astonished storekeeper could interfere, he whipped a dozen of them into a handkerchief and walked off.

The Jap's Military Kit.

The Japanese papers to hand by the last mail are full of details concerning the prowess, the deeds of valour, and the equipment of the Japanese soldiers in the field against China. It is interesting to

know that each soldier is rigidly limited to his marching kit as personal baggage. Only officers are allowed such luxuries as a change of clothes. The kit of the private soldier is slightly lighter than the European average. It includes a spare pair of boots (new), change of underwear, overcoat with hood, pocket filter, field glasses, four pairs of straw sandals, water bottle, bag to carry four days' compressed rice, magazine rifle and ammunition, and sword bayonet. Many of them have bought old blades by celebrated makers to fit on old bayonet handle, as the excellent qualities of the Japanese swords are well known.

The United States Army.

A number of suggestions, some of them of an important and far-reaching character, for the organisation of the army of the United States of America, have, the *Morning Post* says, recently been made. The views of the United States War Department have been embodied in a Bill which was presented to the National House of Committee a few weeks ago by Major Davis, Military Aide to the Secretary for War, and a fortnight ago in the Senate itself by Gen. Hawley. In this form it will serve as a basis of discussion in the States Committee, and there is no doubt in view of the state of popular feeling with regard to military matters in America it will provoke much controversy. As the measure stands it provides for an increase of at least 5,000 men in the enlisted strength of the army. It also provides for the introduction of the three battalions per regiment strength in the infantry, thus bringing about a uniform system of command in the three arms—cavalry, artillery, and infantry. Although comparatively a small matter, this subject of three-battalion regiment commands has provoked the keenest disputation in the United States. Whilst introducing the measure before the House of Committee, Major Davis said the decision of the War Department "was arrived at after a thorough consideration of the subject in all its aspects, and after consultation with a large number of officers of the army." The principal points of the Bill, which is entitled one for the "reorganisation" of the United States Army, can be summarised as follows:—That the line of the army shall consist of the battalion of engineers as it now stands, 10 regiments of cavalry, five of artillery, and 25 of infantry. The establishment of the cavalry regiments to be 12 troops, with a captain and two lieutenants to each, organised into three squadrons, the whole commanded by a full colonel, assisted by a lieutenant colonel and two majors. A regiment of foot artillery, which has its equivalent in our own garrison artillery, shall consist of 12 batteries organised into three battalions. In the field artillery a regiment will be composed of two field batteries. Each battery, whether of foot or field artillery, will be commanded by a captain and two lieutenants, and each regiment by a colonel, assisted by a lieutenant colonel and three majors. Regiments of infantry