

The Eastern Question.

The following lecture delivered at the "United Service Institution" on the 14th February last, by Lt. Col. C. E. HOWARD VINCENT, has a peculiar interest just now, especially as by the late news received from the East, we learn that Servia and Montenegro have thrown off their allegiance to Turkey, and are now in open rebellion.

A lecture was delivered at the United Service Institution on Monday, the 14th inst., by Lieutenant Colonel C. E. Howard Vincent F.R.G.S., barrister at law, and late of the 23rd Royal Welsh Fusiliers, on "The Turkish Forces and the Military Aspects of the Question." General Lord Sandhurst, G.C.B., was in the chair. The lecturer stated that while in Turkey, although he was there without any official character or recommendation, every consideration was shown to him as an Englishman. After paying a tribute to the Sultan as an advanced and intelligent military reformer, Lieutenant Colonel Vincent gave an account of the organization of the Turkish forces. The Ottoman dominions are divided into 120 military conscriptions, and nearly evenly among them are located the seven corps of which the Imperial Army is composed. Following exactly the northern model four units makes up the total of national defence. The standing Army, or Nizam; the reserve, or *Ikoliat*; the Militia, *Landwehr*, or *Redif*; the National Guard, *Landsturm*, or *Mustafiz*; representing, without the aid of the latter force, a paper strength of 750,000 men. Make no note, however, of these figures, nor of any indeed taken from Turkish sources which I may adduce. I frame my data from the concurrence of testimony, but cannot even thus hope to be near the mark. There is no doubt that it would be impossible to put more than half a million of Turks into the field.

"The standing army is recruited by conscription from the Mohammedan population of the Empire. Six times does the faithful Mussulman dive into the ballot box. If in these six years the Nizam does not secure a recruit, the lucky one passes at once into the *Redif*. Such, though, cannot be the good fortune of the majority, and the conscript thus spells out his twenty years of service:—4 years in the standing army, 2 years in the Reserve, 3 years in the *Redif* (1st ban), 3 years in the *Redif* (2nd ban), and 8 years in the *Mustafiz*. The four years in the standing army are usually reduced to three, or even two—a measure reducing battalion strength, but prudent alike on social and economical grounds.

Of the seven *corps d'armée*, three are stationed in Europe, at Constantinople, Shumla, and Monastir; and four in Asia, at Erzeroum, Bagdad, Damascus, and Sanala.

"Each corps consists of 7 regiments (28 battalions) of infantry, 5 regiments (30 squadrons) of cavalry, and one regiment (84 guns) of artillery, with a theoretical strength of 27,000 men, which in war is supposed to be supplemented by 34 battalions of *Redifs*.

"The first corps is frequently termed the Imperial Guard, and Yousouff Effendi, the eldest son of His Majesty, is the titular commander. The men composing it are in a great measure selected from the whole Empire, for the inhabitants of the capital are exempted from service.

"The Turkish infantry may be said to be without its superior in Europe as regards material. It consists of forty nine regiments with four battalions of eight companies.

The system of drill was devised by Hussein Avni Pasha, now Governor of Broussa, but under whose Grand Vizierate and Presidency at the Seraskeriât, the flood gates of improvement opened on the country and the army. The rapidity with which the Osmanli soldierly move is extraordinary and unparalleled—compact independence, to which the neat yet easy uniform conduces. A fez, blue jacket and waistcoat trimmed with red, scarlet sash around the waist, trousers ample to the middle of the calf, then tight as a gaiter, and running into a soft boot of untanned leather. Such is the dress of gunner, trooper, and linesman.

"The infantry is completely armed with breechloading rifles—long Sniders, short Sniders, original, converted, of Tower pattern, of American make, Winchester's Remington's Peabody's—every system, I believe, that inventive genius has devised. Rifles, though, are not of themselves engines of destruction. The recent neglect and hard usage. Without cartridges they avail but little, and there is no machinery for using the complex ammunition required. In time the Henry Martini rifles ordered from the Providence Tool Company will be supplied and more uniformity insured.

"The Ottoman cavalry consists of thirty five regiments of six squadrons each, with a supposed complement of 100 men, armed for the most part with Winchester repeating carbine, sword, and pistol. At best, the cavalry partakes considerably of an irregular character. The men are good Oriental horsemen, but the officers are no less untrained for field service than they are by nature unendowed with dash, energy, and spirit. The country is full of smart little horses, but there is no remounting system, and not unfrequently a fourth of the regiment is on foot, and another fourth are on worn out screws ere a remount can be obtained. Of one regiment it is narrated that, reduced to a few score mounted men, the colonel, after long solicitation, obtained the required sum. The season was winter. He thought that the grant placed at interest till the spring would then enable him to buy more animals. The Koran forbade such a scheme. In the regimental chest the sum was locked. There were long arrears of pay owing to the men, and an order came that the remount grant should be applied to defray them. The regiment of horse became a regiment of foot.

"The Imperial artillery boasts of seven regiments and one in reserve. Each regiment is composed of three horse and nine field batteries of six guns. The former have four pounders, the latter six. The whole of the guns are on Krupp's system and of his manufacture, with the exception of six mountain guns made by Sir Joseph Whitworth's firm, and the six mitrailleuses attached to each regiment. Not only has the whole of the artillery been provided with breechloading cannon, but there are sufficient in store to re-arm every battery. As with the rifles, though, the feeding machinery has been neglected. The guns are there, but ammunition wagons are to a great extent wanting.

"The chief deficiency of the Turkish artillery lies, however, in the horses. The native animals are not adapted to the work, and the entire supply has to be drawn from Hungary. An annual commission is sent, and some good animals obtained at prices varying from £25 to £40. But it is on all sides agreed that the Hungarian horse is deficient in stamina, and in many eventualities it is obvious that even this market would be closed. The scarcity of draught horses becomes a more serious thing when the total absence of a transport corps is considered

—in a country, moreover, where no levy on the inhabitants could produce any result.

"There is likewise no regular engineer corps, as the state of the defences throughout the Empire only too clearly shows, and of course both pontoon and telegraph trains are wanting.

"The medical department of the army, on the other hand, is well organised. The School of Medicine at Pera is turning out excellent graduates—not enough, truly at present for the requirements of the Service, but in time the German surgeons now in the temporary employ of the Porte will be supplanted by Turkish practitioners. One alien alone will then remain, Dr. Temple, formerly of the 18th Royal Irish, attached to the 1st Regiment of Artillery, and Surgeon Extraordinary to His Majesty, exempt by Imperial mandate from the disqualifications of foreigners.

"The military hospitals are numerous, well arranged and beautifully kept. Close to the principal one at Scutari is the British cemetery, the resting place of many a gallant soldier of the Queen. The care bestowed upon it by the guardian, Sergeant Lyne, late of the Royal Engineers, is beyond all praise. Strange is the contrast with the ruined graveyards of the Turks hard by.

"The officers of the Ottoman service form, with the exception of the surgeons, the weakest portion of the entire system. Ill-trained from cradle to school, ill regulated from school to life's close, they possess, though perhaps not by their fault, few physical or moral virtues. Forced to discount their day at ruinous rates, the majority live from hand to mouth, and military proficiency meets with but scant reward. The staff hardly deserves the name, although some of its members receive a kind of special training, so small is it numerically; so weak, for the most part, intellectually; so indolent physically. The military school of the Empire from the peculiar pleasure of the Sultan. The shortcomings of Turkish officers are in no way traceable to any deficiency in the means of education. The schools are of two categories—primary, giving a general education, and receiving boys for four years between the ages of twelve and eighteen, secondary, receiving students under sixteen years of age, and after a four years course drafting them into the army. I visited a school of each character in detail, and many as now are the military colleges in Europe that I have visited, I never found a better system in any country.

"With regard to the reserve or *Ikoliat*, the lecturer stated that arms for the reserve of each battalion are kept at headquarters; clothing and accoutrements likewise. In theory the reserve men, on the outbreak of war, revert to their original corps. But, owing partly to the absence of all methodical civil administration, partly to the imperfect means of communication, there is no possibility of the principal being enforced. Last autumn showed the truth of this statement. The reserve men are seized by the first regiment they meet. Were it otherwise, they would never reach the theatre of operations.

"In the Militia or *Redif*, the period of service is twelve years—the first three, theoretically, in the senior battalion, the second three in the junior battalion. But, with very few exceptions, this second battalion has no real existence. The officers of the *Redif* form a permanent institution in the proportion of two to each company, and one field officer per battalion. For a month in each year the *Redif* is called out for training. Not the whole battalion—the six contingents, in the absence of the second, forming but