

PRUSSIAN INFANTRY TACTICS.

A work recently published at Berlin under the title, "Studies on the New Infantry Tactics," by Major von Scherff, of the head-quarter staff, has been translated by Lieut. Graham, and is published by Messrs H. S. King and Co., Cornhill. The following is an article which has lately appeared in the *Militair Wochenblatt*, the organ of the Prussian Army, with regard to this important book:—

"Under this modest and unpretentious title a book has just appeared which would seem about to exercise considerable influence on the new rules of the tactics of fighting.

"The two great wars which in these last ten years have surprised Europe by the manner in which they have been carried on, and by their results, have convinced all those who have taken part in them of the necessity for some tactical rules more suitable to the powerful efficacy of modern weapons than those which have been employed hitherto. Those who have been the victors in the combats are especially convinced that the precepts of fighting taught at drill during peace time, and which were believed to be in accordance with the exigencies of the new armament, did not answer sufficiently the expectation formed of them. Each one feels the necessity for increasing the solidity of troops which are fighting in skirmishing order, and of introducing order and a certain system in the disorder and looseness attending on this method of fighting which infantry are now obliged to follow owing to the effects of the long range of breech loading arms, and of the rifled cannon. It is the discussion of this important question, with which so many capable and practical men in the army have been already occupied, and which for some time past has been and is now keeping the mind of every officer who thinks and reflects on the stretch, so to speak—that the author of these studies in a very clear manner, with a logical force which is rare, and while basing his remarks upon a profound experience of that which happens as well during war as during peace. We dare not pronounce in a definite manner upon the value of the solution of this question, but we think that we can now, before a more authorised criticism has been pronounced, say, that up till now the essential points of the debate have never yet been put forward with an equal precision and clearness.

"War demands decisive results, and these decisive results can only be obtained by the offensive, whether that offensive be taken from the beginning or whether it ensues after a happily conducted defence. But by the side of this there is in every war a series of engagements which have not for their object a similar defence or solution, which are like the interludes of a grand drama. It is in accordance with them that the mode of action should be regulated; one ought either to have some decisive result immediately in view, or else one ought never to have to look for it.

"This is the base of modern infantry tactics, which, relatively to the manner of conducting the fight, should place before everything else the following fundamental principles:—

"1st. Every commanding officer thrown upon his own resources, and finding himself in front of the enemy, ought from the beginning to ask himself the following questions: Can he, or ought he, yes or no, achieve a decisive result, or else, will he, yes or no, be able to obtain any advantages

by shortening or by protracting the combat?

"2nd. If a negative answer must be given to those two questions, he must avoid fighting as much as possible; or else cease fighting if fighting has begun.

"3rd. If the case permits him to come to the determination to accept a decisive combat, he should on principle conduct it offensively. If, on the other hand, without being sufficiently strong by himself to decide the action, he can rely on receiving ultimately sufficient reinforcements, he ought to protract the fight as much as possible, and act in such a manner, so as to take away all idea of the offensive which the enemy may have by assuming it himself.

"4th. It is only in cases which are altogether exceptional, or if the terrain requires it in a quite particular manner, that he ought to accept a decisive battle in a position which at the commencement places him on the defensive. Thence we have, as the chief tactical forms, the offensive, the defensive offensive, and the protracted combat, which the author calls in addition the demonstrative. These three denominations forms the titles of the three chapters of the book.

"For the offensive a formation is necessary which permits of the greatest possible mobility, which offers at the same time guarantees against the enemy's fire, whilst favouring to the highest degree possible the efficiency of the fire of the attack. This formation will be found in the individual order, an expression which must be applied to all those fighting dispositions comprised up till now under the denominations of extended order or deployed order, which latter are less significant.

"Every offensive fight must undergo the following phases:—The preparation, the carrying it out, every effort being strained to the utmost extent, the reaction which follows this tension, and finally the re-establishment of order. The formation in question should adapt itself to each of these phases.

"It is necessary to consider apart from these different periods of the fight, the manœuvres by which one engages, the effective character of a protracted fight, and allow a decision to be arrived at, if one ought to attack, where and how it is to be made. If it is decided to attack, this attack must be carried on against some determined object, by the shortest road possible, without stopping and with all the available forces, consequently one must act concentrated, and with the reserves as weak as possible.

"The blade cuts or else it breaks; the army conquers, or else there only remains to collect the debris.

"This attack should be carried out by a first line of skirmishers; one company entirely deployed, each man is allowed the space of 1½ paces; a second company forming a second line of support, deploying by degrees according to necessity; two companies massed in rear, to make the assault properly so called, and for breaking through.

"The first line of skirmishers approaching the enemy without firing if it is possible, up to that distance where the efficacy of the weapon comes into play, advances from thence by fractions, and by rushes, without any halting, and keeping up an individual fire by word of command, up to the place indicated as that where the final shock is to take place. The second line, that of the supports intended to supply all the reinforcements which the different circumstances of the fight may render neces-

sary, in doubling up from the first line, gives at the moment which precedes the decisive shock, to the fire of the latter with as much severity as possible. The companies in close order, form up into columns of half battalions for example up to that zone in which they are only liable to be hit by stray bullets, should the moment they leave it, only assume a line formation in company columns at from forty to eighty paces distant from each other. When they are fifty paces from the line of skirmishers reinforced by the entire line of the supports, the signal for the assault is given and one hurls oneself upon the enemy in order to break through the lines with cries of "Hurrah, hurrah! Forwards, forwards!"

"Every one must endeavour to reach the extremity of the position attacked, and this must form a boundary which should never be overstepped. In a body of troops which has made a similar attack the re-establishment of order must now be the principal point attended to. If pursuit is necessary, it must be entrusted to the reserves, which follow, or to the cavalry.

"Their mission is also to parry counter attacks on the part of the defence, to cover the flanks of the assailant, who ought to have one single object to attend to, viz., of attaining that end which has been determined on,

"The artillery should prepare, to accompany and complete the action.

"Everything that we have said," continues the *Militair Wochenblatt* "is hardly an indication of the materials contained in this excellent work. Our only object was to draw attention to it, and recommend its immediate perusal.

"In the interest of the German Army, we wish great success to this courageous book. May it on its part contribute to ensure victory again under our colours!"

THE DARIEN SHIP CANAL.—The New York *Sun* says:—As the cutting of a canal through the Isthmus of Panama is still a shadowy project, seagoing men will be pleased to learn that the Chilean Government contemplate the establishment of a harbour of refuge near Cape Horn. The captain of the British barque *Cedric* has discovered a splendid bay with safe anchorage in the Island of Wollaston, of the Hermit group, south of Terra del Fuego, and 29 miles distant from Cape Horn. The bay is well protected from winds and storms, and the vegetation around is magnificent. The Indians were found to be docile, and much more intelligent than the wretched inhabitants of Terra del Fuego. The harbour is said to be superior even to that of the Falkland Island. These islands as is well known, belong to Great Britain, and the discovery of a sheltering harbor near Cape Horn will tend to seriously affect the prosperity of the British settlement.

COLONIZATION ROADS.—The Ontario estimates for 1873 contains the following items: Pembroke and Mattawa road to extend the same towards the Mattawa, \$9,000. Missisquoi to complete through Ashley and Meays, \$5,000. Paterson road—to repair from Madawasga to Papineau Creek, \$1,000. The appropriation of \$4,000 made last session for the survey and exploration of a road line from Fairy Lake to the mouth of Mattawa river on the Ottawa not having been expended, is revoked.