

## THE NEW DRILL BOOK.

(The Broad Arrow.)

In three last issues we have given a *précis* of Parts I, II and V of the new Drill Book, which were issued for trial at the Aldershot manoeuvres. Probably the alterations, or a slight modification of them, will be finally adopted, and they will for the most part be considerable improvements on old methods. We dread, however, to think what the "wearers of green spectacles" will say when they learn that the slow march is to be abolished. But even civilians can keep step at a funeral, although they have not been taught the goose step. The ceremonious business of "taking open order" also disappears, and for this purpose the rear rank will simply step back two paces and take up its own dressing. That cherished invention of some tactical expert, "the high step," or "prance," also disappears. The most important change that is to take place in elementary drill is the concession of 36 inches in place of 24 for each soldier in the ranks, whilst in double rank the rear rank is to be 60 inches from the front rank, instead of 30 inches, as formerly.

In company drill there is an important change, which is a mixture of the German company column and of the group formation of the "heaven-born soldier." The company will be divided into fire units, which are in effect sections or sub-sections of men always accustomed to work and stand together in the ranks. In battalions on the low establishment the sections would be about 5 files, or on a war establishment the company column would stand with 8 sub-sections of the same number. We do not see, however, how this plan can work at home, where, owing to guards, fatigues, schools of instruction, and what not, the company fire units may consist of one man each! As our abstract of changes shows, there will be no attempt to equalise the companies, further than, if a company does not exceed 10 files, it is to be joined on as two complete fire units to another company; in the same way if the number of a fire unit falls below 4 men, it is to be joined on to another fire unit, retaining its own organization. With equalising, sizing a company preparatory to drill falls to the ground. Our "green spectacted" friends, however, will say that it does not matter, as our soldiers are as small and as like one another as peas. The company is to "fall in" in a column of sections or sub-sections, and each of these will be numbered off independently. In Part V, which deals with the attack formation, it is stated that there will be 2 paces interval between fire units and 6 paces between companies, but not having seen the part allotted to battalion drill, it is not clear whether the rule is general or only for attack, whether, in fact, when line is formed, the intervals will be left.

The greatest interest in the proposed changes, however, attaches itself to Part V, which deals with "movements in presence of an enemy and battle formation in attack." The following extract from the Drill Book of 1889 enunciates the theory on which the attack formation contained in it was formed:—"Although the history of war shows that rules have often to be set aside, yet normal tactical formations have a real absolute value, and, when adapted to the configuration of the ground and to the nature and condition of the troops, seldom fail to influence favourably the issue of a contest." On the other hand, the proposed Drill Book, in imitation of the latest German production, says:—"Fixed rules for movements in presence of and action against an enemy cannot be laid down." Which of these two theories is the right one? The new Drill Book goes on to say:—"The formations adopted by the attacking force must be suited to the character of the enemy, to his mode of fighting, to the weapons with which he is armed, and to the ground to be traversed." These last observations are a series of truisms, no doubt equally true at all times and

under all systems, but they do not for all that nullify the advantage of a normal form of attack. Given an extensive range of ground, comprising hill and valley, where entrenchments and field works may be shown and varied at will, the no-fixed form system is clearly the best, and some day, when the British public looks upon the army as something with which it has a great deal to do besides simply paying for it, there will be no station in the United Kingdom where every facility for the instruction of troops will not be found. But at present, when at most stations in Great Britain and Ireland the opportunities for practising the attack are wanting, a normal form seems almost a necessity. There is, to be sure, the following in the "General Principles":—"The firing line moves as a rule in extended order"; but again we find the somewhat contradictory rule that "As many men should be placed in the firing line as the ground will permit, consistently with the efficient use of their rifles." The last disposition seems to resolve itself into a continuous single-rank line, each man occupying 30 inches. We should say that the true principle is that no more men should be placed in the firing line than is necessary to maintain a continuous advance. A subaltern is to command each half company, and a non-commissioned officer is to be in command of each fire-unit; moreover, in each fire-unit a selected soldier is to be trained as leader to take the place of the non-commissioned officer if required. The adjutant or other selected officer, with the regimental sergeant-major, are to have charge of the regimental ammunition carts, and to see to the supply of ammunition from them to the firing line.

The amount of ammunition to be taken on service for infantry is 322 rounds for the magazine rifle and 290 for the Henry-Martini. The soldier will carry 100 rounds of small bore ammunition, as against 70 Henry-Martini, which will be a considerable gain. We desire once more to press on the military authorities our recommendation for the creation at Aldershot of a special instructional battalion for infantry, such battalion having a specially-selected commanding officer, a major, and an adjutant, but being otherwise composed of officers, non-commissioned officers, and privates taken from all the battalions of infantry that are not serving at Aldershot. Problems of drill and minor tactics would then be confined to such a battalion for solution. If there is to be no normal form of attack it is most important that all ranks should be thoroughly practised and trained to make use of the most suitable formations and tactics under all circumstances.

We shall probably see as many methods of attack as there are commanding officers, and whilst the commanding officer who has had nothing but a barrack square to drill his men in will probably stick to the old British line formation covered by skirmishers, other commanding officers will go in for "waves" and "groups" and all sorts of fancy work! *Tot homines, tot sententie.*

The importance of the Canadian-Pacific route is now fully recognised. At the present moment a member of the staff of *The Broad Arrow* is making his way by stages to Vancouver, and will shortly furnish his impressions as to the resources and value of this route as a military line to India. Meanwhile, the Admiralty are about to test the rapidity with which a considerable body of seamen can be despatched to the Pacific Station by way of Halifax and Vancouver. Fifty officers and some 700 men are to make the journey, and the experience will of course be expensive; but it is nevertheless necessary. The only drawback to the Canadian route is that it is of little value for naval purposes, as unfortunately ships cannot yet be sent overland; but for military purposes the route will prove invaluable.—*Broad Arrow.*