

MARCHING POWER OF INFANTRY.

As the strength of a chain cannot exceed the strength of its weakest link, so the marching power of an army cannot, generally speaking, exceed the marching power of that arm which moves slowest, namely, the infantry. We say generally speaking, because recent suggestions as to the introduction of a powerful force of mounted rifles would, if adopted, somewhat modify our statement, which, however, may be accepted, as substantially correct, until what almost deserves to be called a new arm of the Service be fairly introduced into warfare—if indeed this ever be the case. Of course, on the other hand, it is not always practicable to move an army so fast as the marching power of its infantry would permit, on account of the impossibility of bringing up supplies at an equal rate; still bearing these two points in view, the general proposition holds good that the marching power of any army is pretty accurately gauged by the marching power of its component infantry.

Now, the changes which have been wrought in the conduct of military operations by the introduction of weapons of great range and precision, as also by the construction of railways and telegraphs, have as recent events show, all tended in the direction of making wars short, sharp, and decisive. The natural consequence of this is to impart increased importance to the marching power of infantry; both as regards strategical and tactical operations. At first sight, indeed, it may appear that the introduction of railways has rather tended to lessen the importance of the marching power of infantry, but such a view—though occasionally mooted by the special correspondents of the daily papers during the late Franco-German war—is entirely erroneous. For, in the first place, it must be observed in passing that notwithstanding the rapid speed of a network of railways over the face of the earth, military operations have still sometimes to be conducted in countries where no such means of locomotion exists; witness, for example, the recent Ashantee war. Then again, even supposing the existence of railways in the field of operations, it must be remembered that there are certain limits to their use for the purposes of military transport. There are circumstances under which an army could be marched a given distance in less time than it could be transported over the same ground by rail; the chief elements in this somewhat curious problem being the size of the army, the distance to be traversed, the character of the country as influencing the length of front, which the troops could present on march, the number and condition of the roads, whether the railway is a double or single line, and whether or not there is more than one railway available, and finally the amount of rolling stock which can be obtained for transport purposes. From these and other considerations—as, for example, the ease with which railways can be rendered useless through the enemy making a sudden dash, blowing up the bridges and tearing up the rails—it follows that to quote the words of Colonel Hamley, “the districts even in Europe, are few where existing railways would leave great armies to any very considerable degree independent of the ordinary roads.” When from strategical we converge upon tactical operations, the increased importance of the marching power of infantry, since recent improvements in arms of precision, is too obvious to need

any comment; for troops in the presence of the enemy must now be moved frequently, more rapidly, and over more ground than in former times.

Having thus, we trust, satisfactorily demonstrated the increased importance which attaches nowadays to the marching power of infantry, it now becomes our duty to point out that the subject is one which seems to demand more attention from our military authorities. It is true that a great deal has been done within the last fifteen or twenty years to increase the marching power of British infantry, chiefly in the direction of rendering their dress and accoutrements more comfortable and lighter, and of improving the scale of diet and the cooking of the rations. Even thirteen years ago, a writer in *Colburn's United Service Magazine*, speaking of the ameliorated condition of the British soldier, observed:—“We now give him food that he can eat, and, what is more, that nourishes him; we have lightened his knapsack; we have improved his clothes, his collar and his stock are lower, and his boots are no longer like canoes.” Since the above was written more improvements in equipments have been introduced, the practical result of which course of action has been that in the late Ashantee War our troops on the march to Comassie were actually clothed and accoutred in a sensible style and one adapted to meet the exigencies of a tropical and pestilential climate. Important, however, as these various changes have been, they, after all, do not touch the root of the matter, which is simply the physical power of the soldier to march. The athlete, when preparing for a pedestrian match, does something more than merely exchange his every day clothes for a suit of flannel and a pair of walking-shoes; he goes in for a preliminary course of physical training, and this, in a modified form, is what seems to be greatly needed in the Army. It is unnecessary to recapitulate the numerous observations which have recently appeared in these columns respecting the physical degeneracy of the recruits; for this appears to be conceded on almost all sides as a matter of fact. But such being the case, it becomes all the more incumbent upon the authorities, as we lately pointed out, to insure the proper physical training of the young soldier, and especially endeavour to develop his marching power. For, recurring to the influence of railways on the subject, it is to be noted that they have probably tended to diminish somewhat the marching power of our infantry, in two ways. In the first place, it seems not unreasonable to suspect that “Parliamentary” and “workmen's” trains have somewhat deteriorated the pedestrian powers of those classes of the community from which recruits are drawn, inasmuch as many young men now ride constantly in third class railway carriages, who some years ago would have had to perform the distance on “Shanks's pony.” Then, moreover, troops are now moved by railway or steamer, distances which, in bygone days they would have marched, so that altogether, it is very questionable if the British soldier—looking at his life both before and after enlistment—has as much hard, earnest pedestrian work as in former times. It must be admitted that more is now done than formerly in the way of camps of exercise and route marching out from military stations; but unfortunately, it is to be feared that that strong flavour of “sham” which unavoidably attaches more or less to such exercises, detracts in no small degree from

the benefits which they are designed to produce. Now it would tend greatly to increase the marching power of our infantry, if, when a regiment or a detachment moves from one station to another, it were, whenever practicable, sent by road instead of by rail; for the different spirit of men on a *bona fide* march and on a day's exercise in route-marching must be familiar to many of our readers. Doubtless, in some of our Line regiments we should, under such circumstances, have a good many weakly recruits falling out by the way, and there would probably be a fine row got up in the penny papers by philanthropic fanatics if a death from heart disease occurred in a regiment on the march. Well, so be it; for after all, what is the use of having battalions that cannot march, any more than of having “ships that cannot swim”? We are glad to observe the recent circular of His Royal Highness the Field Marshal Commanding-in-Chief respecting military gymnasiums, although we suspect that more or less compulsory attendance will have to be enforced before these establishments can be expected to play a proper part in the economy of the British Army. As, however, the Duke of Cambridge is thus unquestionably directing his attention to the physical training of the soldier, we may perhaps hope that ere long some more decided steps may be taken towards developing still further the marching power of our infantry.—*Broad Arrow*.

MOUNTED INFANTRY.

Sir,—This is an arm which has been often alluded to by recent military writers and lecturers, but I have heard of no plan for mounting the infantry, except putting them on horseback, a plan which many think would only result in making an indifferent body of cavalry. It would of course, be possible to make a good body of cavalry, but that is not the object: in so far as infantry mounted on horses differed from cavalry, just so far would they be inferior to them.

The difficulties horsesmen have to contend with in fighting on foot are—

1st. That, at most, only half the men can leave the horses, unless the horses are linked, in which case there must be time and a safe place for the horses.

2nd. Even with half the men mounted, the horses cannot be easily moved, except at a slow pace; and if linked they cannot be moved at all.

3rd. Led or linked horses are perfectly helpless—can neither fight nor run away.

I would suggest that infantry should be mounted on light, strong wagons, each drawn by four horses; fourteen men to each wagon—viz., twelve on the wagon and two drivers on the near horses (as in the artillery).

In each wagon should be two double seats, each double seat to hold six men, sitting back to back. The seats should be boxes and hold a field kit for each man and reserve ammunition. The men to carry their arms and accoutrements on their persons. I would have the wagons open at the sides, to give greater facility for getting in and out to the men who sit facing inwards.

The leading horses of each wagon to wear breast pieces, not collars, and both to be saddled—the traces to hook on to the breast-pieces just by girth of saddle, so that by simply unhooking the traces the two leaders are ready to do duty as troopers—there is a driver already on one, and the second driver mounts the other, the left hand man on front seat mounting the wheeler and taking the place of driver.

* “Operations of War,” Page 51.

* “Military Gymnastics,” *Broad Arrow*, May 30, 1874.