

**OBLIQUE ORDER OF FREDERICK THE GREAT.**—No one knew better than Frederick the Great the meaning and value of turning a flank, and yet he makes distinct mention of what he calls his "oblique order." Many of his readers, including perhaps Napoleon I., have evidently understood his mention of the oblique order as something distinct. It seems not improbable that it may have been the parent of the converging attack. There was, of course, some risk in it, but a great deal of reality. In former days the overthrow of the assailants would depend on active measures being taken by the defender against the exposed flank. But, first, few armies have adopted the defensive with the Duke of Wellington's quiet determination giving the enemy all the labour and risk, and then knocking him over: the defensive with foreigners being generally a sign of diffidence. And second, Frederick rather liked an enemy to come out of his position, for he was generally prepared to return the charge vigorously and enter with him.

The exposed flank was therefore probably very well supported. In these days the fire of the assailant would converge from a long distance, his exposed flank would be covered against fire, a direct counter-attack against him would be questionable, and he must provide against a flank attack by echellons in support and the fire of artillery.

#### INFANTRY DRILL.

An "Infantry Officer" sends us the following very sensible remarks upon this important subject:—"The columns of the *Times* have of late been opened to several military writers, who advocate various immediate and sweeping changes in our drill; more especially has a 'Subaltern of the Guards' endeavoured to overthrow with levelled lance the obstructive windmill of the *Field Exercise Book*. In the present transition state of our forces it cannot but be of benefit that public attention should be loudly called to this important subject. Would you then kindly permit an officer of the line, through the medium of a professional paper, to add his mite of observations to the questions at issue? The three points principally advocated are—1. An immediate and radical change in the drill book, to adapt our field exercises to the requirements of modern warfare. 2. An intermediate present abolition by General Order of the *Field Exercise Book*, to prevent wrong principles being taught. 3. The introduction into our drill of the Prussian company column. If the object of all drills were simply to lead the troops in suitable formation against the enemy, then, indeed, half-a-dozen pages of a new drill book would be quite sufficient; but every practical soldier recognises as a truth that the greatest difficulty on service is to keep the men in hand while in action and under fire—a difficulty greatly increased since modern requirements demand a much more extended and looser formation. Now the real object of drills is to teach the men the habits of discipline, and of prompt unthinking obedience, and to teach the officers the habits of command. It takes years of daily and unremitting training in the drill field and barrack room before a soldier can be brought to such a state of discipline as, in the flurry and excitement of action, to hear and at once attend to the orders of his superiors. But on the other hand, a lifetime is often insufficient to teach the officer how to command. It is not enough to give correct orders; the manner of giving orders, so as to rivet and enforce attention and obedience, is an art in itself.

Some few are born with it, others acquire it in course of military service, often unconsciously, while too many in a lifetime fail to acquire this all-important art, and with it the confidence of their subordinates on service. Now, strict, accurate, and rigid drill is the one great means of teaching officers to command and soldiers to obey. If an officer is deficient in the native art of commanding, the word of command becomes as it were a magic formula the use of which enforces obedience and conceals from the men, and perhaps from the officers, the latter's want of professional aptitude. It is, therefore, essential that accurate drill movements should be constantly practised in the Army, in order that the habits of commanding and obeying, acquired by constant practice, may be preserved in the vital moments of action; and if, on the other hand, our drill were reduced to half a dozen movements really required on service, the continued reiteration of these few on the drill field would become so tedious that attention would inevitably slacken, and man would be driven out of the service by ennui. From this point of view the maintenance of strict and varied drill formations would appear to have important advantages, which should not be relinquished without reflection. The experiment proposed, of abolishing the present drill before establishing a new one, would be a fatal playing with edged tools. Officers left to invent their own movements and words of command would often find themselves fatally hampered for want of the accustomed formula, and might gravely compromise themselves by betraying to their men how inefficiently they were able to control them without the aid of traditional forms. On the other hand, officers and men strictly and carefully trained and disciplined according to existing forms, would very soon at the will of the general adopt without confusion new forms demanded the circumstances. Though unknown to the drill book of his time, Sir C. Campbell had no difficulty at Balaklava in making the 93rd receive Russian cavalry in line. To charge in extended order, to seek independent cover by companies or sections, to open out literally and lie down when under fire without cover, would be an easy matter for well-drilled troops, though not previously trained to it, and a General Order giving such directions would be sufficient to have these and similar rules carried out on service, but let us not for these objects sacrifice the means by which we acquire discipline. The cry for the Prussian company column formation in our Army seems to be equally unnecessary. The Prussian company, 240 strong on a war footing, consists of two divisions three deep, or three divisions two deep (the third rank, picked marksmen, being in the latter case formed into a separate division). In company column these divisions are sometimes in quarter column, sometimes in double column of subdivisions on the centre. This formation in itself gives no peculiar manœuvring facilities. It is quite large enough to be a very palpable mark for artillery and infantry fire, as was proved often enough in the late campaign; it was a very awkward formation as a support to skirmishers, and as such has been abandoned by the Prussians in their late Autumn Manœuvres. Those who wish to introduce this formation in our Army seem to follow the shadow instead of the substance—the form instead of the spirit. The real Prussian advantage lies not in the formation of the company column, but in the constitution of the company. The Prussian company is officered by five offi-

cers, inclusive of the captain—the latter is mounted in the field. In the broken and detached nature of modern warfare, when a Prussian company is in action, one half, or one division at least, is skirmishing, the remainder are in support; the mounted captain commands both the skirmishers and the supports; they are all his own men, in whom he is equally interested, and he takes care that they are supported, sustained, relieved or reinforced as may be required. In fact, in the Prussian mounted captain we find a link in the chain of the responsibility of battle, which in our service, is almost entirely wanting. It was beautiful to observe how harmoniously supports and skirmishers worked in Prussian Autumn Manœuvres, while a deficiency of harmony was very observable in our own. When an English battalion sends out, for instance, three companies to skirmish, and three to support, the skirmishers and supports are quite independent of each other; the supporting captain will take no orders from the skirmishing one. The commanding officer cannot look to everything; one of his majors commands the reserve, the other, with no specially assigned duty, looks probably after the direction of the skirmishing line, and the three supporting companies very likely amuse themselves by trying to preserve their relative dressing. Now, if a link be really here wanting, as above shown, would it not be better, instead of adopting a Prussian not very good formation, to make other modifications suited to the genius of our Army? I venture to suggest the following:—Form every two companies into tactical and organic unit under a mounted officer, something like the squadron in the Cavalry; in other words, appoint five majors to each battalion—one for the depot companies, four for the service companies. Let the major be the commander of the two company unit in barracks, on parade, and in the field. Establish an intermediate link between the captains and commanding officer, more real and thorough than the present nominal and anomalous post of majors of wings."—*Army and Navy Gazette*.

**A NARROW GAUGE.**—The novelty of a miniature locomotive engine and carriages running upon a miniature railway with a gauge of only 18 inches, and doing good service, was witnessed for the first time at the Royal Arsenal on January 10 by nearly all the principal officers of the various departments. The rail, which at present extends only from the West Wharf to the back of the shell foundry, is composed of iron plates cast in the royal laboratory, each of the plates being 6 feet long, and weighing about 3½ cwt. They are laid simply together on a bed of concrete, keyed together to preserve their position, and the line appears firm and durable without the aid of sleepers or bolts such as are employed in the construction of ordinary railways. It was designed and carried out by Colonel Scratchly, Royal Engineers, inspector of works at the arsenal, who, accompanied by Colonel Milward, Colonel Fields and other officers, went on the trial trip this afternoon, and found it completely satisfactory.

The British navy in commission on January 1, comprised 160 steamships and vessels including yachts, tenders, and gunboats, mounting 1,283 guns, and manned by 28,371 officers, men and boys; and 64 sailing ships and vessels (including 25 coast guard tenders), mounting 439 guns, and manned by 4,697 officers, men and boys; giving a grand total 224 ships and vessels, mounting 1,722 guns, manned by 34,328 officers, men and boys.