

THE CANTERBURY RIDING ESTABLISHMENT.

By ERNEST W. LOW.

Illustrated from photographs by H. B. COLLIS, Canterbury.



FEW people will deny that the Military Tournament occupies a unique position in its hold on the spectacle-loving public. And year after year the popularity of the great Islington display goes up by leaps and bounds. Nightly, during its progress last year, hundreds had to be turned away disappointed, for, vast as is the accommodation round the arena, every available inch of it was occupied. Nor indeed is it any matter for surprise that such is usually the case, for the spectacle as a whole is calculated to arouse the enthusiasm of the most lukewarm audience, let alone that of one which loves the sight of the "lads in red" (and blue, too), and is ever prepared to give hearty recognition to feats of personal skill and daring.

And if the Tournament as a whole is in high favour, certainly the mounted displays rank highest in popular estimation. The statement must not be taken to imply that the "high-low" branches of the service do not show to advantage; far from it; the feats they perform often require a very great amount of skill and careful preparation. On

"musical ride," the cavalry outpost display, the barebacked riding and "voltige," and in fact all the mounted displays, appeal with



TILTING AT THE RING.

equal force to the "mere civie" craning over the barrier as to the "hero of a hundred fights," whose trained eye, critical but approving, takes in every detail from his coign of vantage in the reserved seats.

And how keen the audience is to notice every little point in the ride; scarcely a detail of either horses or men is not commented upon, often with no little shrewdness, but sometimes with an ingenuous innocence highly diverting to the listener who happens to be behind the scenes.

One question there is which crops up with never-failing persistency. "Splendid, old man, isn't it? Better than a circus. Where the dickens do they learn it all?" The key to the riddle is to be found in the subject of this article. To many who each year look forward with pleasurable anticipations to the Tournament, it may be of interest to learn something about the system which brings about such a pitch of excellence as is therein displayed.

The sergeant who, when sitting for his education certificate, wrote that Canterbury was famous for its riding-schools was perhaps a poor historian but a very typical cavalryman, for to the latter that is *the* feature



READY FOR THE BAYONET.

the other hand, in many instances the possession of some technical knowledge is essential to duly appreciate them, whilst the

of the old town, with its thousand-and-one memories of the Middle Ages. Of course the individual man may linger with affection over the rare associations in which the cathedral town is so rich, but to the cavalryman, *qua* cavalryman, Canterbury and the "Establishment" are almost synonymous terms. The establishment, or—to give it the name by which it is generally known—the "Stab," is virtually the cavalryman's university. And as such it is regarded throughout that arm of the service.

The recruit of three months' standing regards the sergeant-instructor who is a "Canterbury man" in much the same light as a grammar-school lad looks up to the old boy who has had a successful career at Oxford or Cambridge. He is to him the embodiment of all the qualities to which he himself would aspire.

The Canterbury certificate is, so to say,



"ATTENTION!"

the hall-mark of a cavalryman's merit, and the very word implies a high standard of excellence.

Has a man a fine position on his horse?—he is said to have quite a "Canterbury" leg. Does he show to advantage when handling a young remount?—he is "doing a Canterbury;" and if a young soldier is noticed to be putting on an undue amount of "side," he will be chaffingly told that if he doesn't take care the colonel will one fine day pick him out to go to Canterbury.

In styling the 'Stab the cavalry university it is not meant to convey the impression that he there learns everything which it is desirable for him to know. For instance, if he would qualify as a musketry instructor he must go through a course at Hythe; as a signalling instructor, at Aldershot, and so forth. However, these schools of instruction are equally available for all other branches.

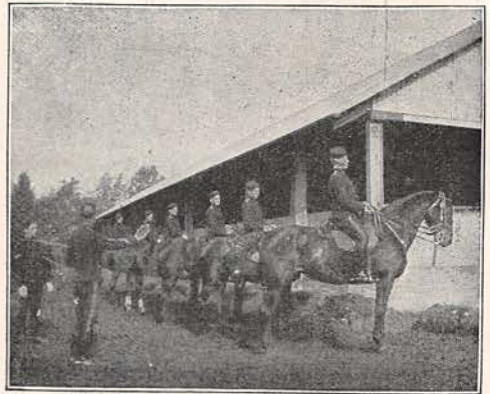


"RIDE" LEAVING THE SCHOOL.

But the 'Stab occupies a different position in every respect. It is reserved exclusively for the training of men in those things which are absolutely peculiar to the cavalry. It does not attempt to deal with a vast amount which it is advisable for the mounted man to learn, but it gives him a thorough training in those essentials without which, though he may be a crack shot and a rapid signaller, he can never hope to become a thoroughly efficient cavalryman. And the Canterbury establishment is the *only* place where the British soldier can receive such a training.

Such then is a general idea of the object and scope of the Cavalryman's University. The "students" are made up of two entirely distinct classes: first, the men who are sent from their regiments to go through the regular course; and secondly, the "graduates," i.e., those who, having already done so, are being trained for riding-masters, and are meanwhile employed as instructors on the establishment. Each of these sections must be dealt with separately.

Two men are sent from each regiment to go through the ordinary course. Care is of course taken in the selection, and to be



IN THE MANÈGE.

eligible a man has to possess certain qualifications. He must be a non-commissioned officer, unmarried, have over three years' service, and, needless to say, have a clean sheet. The choice lies with the colonel of each regiment, who selects the men who recommend themselves to him by their capabilities. They need not necessarily be fine riders—of course a rank duffer would not be picked out; but often a man who is only a very average horseman may show signs of possessing qualities marking him out as eminently fitted to be trained as an instructor. The men selected by their colonel have to be seen by the inspector-general of cavalry, who judges of their suitability for the training.

Another condition, which is of recent date, is that they have to agree to re-engage after the expiration of their first term of enlistment. The short-service system rendered this imperative. Without it a man would very likely, after going through his course, take his discharge and utilise his knowledge in civilian life, the trouble and expense which his training entailed upon the authorities being thus thrown away.

Exceptions are occasionally made in the length of service condition with regard to men of regiments serving in India. The depôts of these corps are at Canterbury, and as no men are sent from abroad to go through the

Since the establishment was moved from Maidstone to Canterbury, some thirty years ago, the system adopted therein has been well-nigh revolutionised. Originally it provided nothing like so thorough a training in the duties of a trained horse-soldier. The men simply used to go through a ride



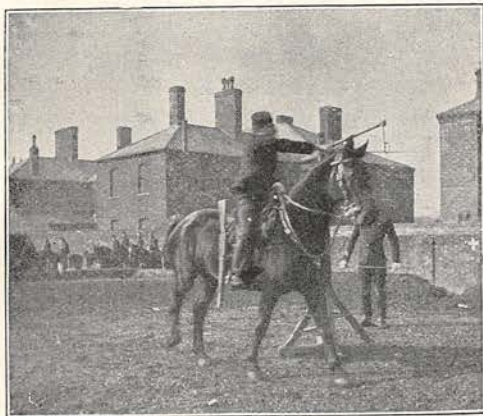
LANCE EXERCISE.

on horses that were already trained, while at present one of the main features of the course lies in the fact that each man has to show his capacity for breaking in a remount.

Another feature, introduced so late as 1883, is the drilling of recruits, which was undreamed of under the old régime. The consequence was that many a Canterbury man, though a smart enough soldier in his way, was utterly incapable of drilling the newly joined, either in the "school" or "on the square." But now, *nous avons changé tout cela*, as I shall proceed to show.

The very first thing the men have to do on joining their class is to go through a preliminary gymnastic course, which mainly consists of a series of evolutions on a wooden horse for the purpose of attaining facility at mounting and dismounting without the aid of stirrups. By this means a certain degree of flexibility and agility is achieved and the men are preparing themselves for the bare-backed course which follows. Many people will remember the excellent performance of this kind at the last Tournament; the men engaged in it were from the establishment, at which it forms part of the regular training.

For this purpose the horse is equipped with a sort of girth or surcingle, attached to the top of which are two handles for the man to hold when he vaults on its back. It is quite astonishing to see what a degree of proficiency the men reach in this work; they



TILTING AT THE RING: "THROUGH."

course, young soldiers are now and again picked out from the recruits to go on the establishment before joining their regiments. As the riding-master of the establishment also presides over the recruits in the depôt, he is able to keep an eye on any likely young fellow who comes under his notice.

mount and dismount while the horse is at a swinging canter, ride "face to tail" and even go over jumps in that awkward position.

The necessity for all this sort of thing may not seem obvious to the layman,



SWORD EXERCISE.

indeed many would not hesitate in saying that it is entirely unnecessary, unless our soldiers are to be turned into circus riders. But the experienced rider will think far otherwise, knowing as he does the all-important axiom that before you can make a good rider of a man he must be taught to "stop there" under all circumstances. The first step is for a man to obtain a good seat, and it is in helping to bring about this desirable consummation that the bare-back riding is so valuable.

But in addition, circumstances might easily arise under which it would be of great practical utility. Thus if a man on service wanted to mount while his horse were on the move, he might easily manage a clean vault into the saddle when an attempt to put his foot into the stirrup would inevitably lead to disaster.

I have already mentioned that every man has to break the horse which is to carry him through his course, and a very ticklish business it sometimes is. The remounts are usually four-year olds, and are mostly bred in Ireland; the majority of them have never had a bridle in their mouths, and it is by no means unusual for a spirited youngster to show his very decided objection to being subjected to that badge of servitude; and the antics of a young horse are not altogether amusing when you happen to be on his back.

Of course very great care has to be taken, as rough treatment might spoil the prospect of the remount developing into a reliable troop-horse. His mouth may easily be ruined

by awkward handling, and it is for this very reason that the training of a young horse forms part of the curriculum. It gives a man "hands"—a quality in which many otherwise good horsemen are so lamentably deficient.

Until their horses are fairly well broken in the class devotes its energies mainly to that task. Not only has the remount to be schooled to obey the bit and leg, but he has to get used to the flash of the sword and the firing of a carbine. When the preliminary part of the horse's education is accomplished the men begin to take them through the more complex evolutions, to which the public have become familiarised by means of the Tournament.

And here again it is a very mistaken idea to suppose that these movements are simply of use for show purposes. Of course a few of the more fantastic features are simply designed to add to the picturesqueness of the ride, but with these exceptions each movement has been introduced with a specific object in view.

Experience has shown that by making a horse perform certain figures the process of training him to obey the slightest touch of rein and spur, or, as it is technically styled, "bending" him, is greatly facilitated. Thus the majority of the movements in the double ride, though they may appear to the uninitiated but fantastic devices, are in reality important factors in the work of horse-breaking.

Only a short time back I had the pleasure



PURSUING PRACTICE.

of seeing at work a class whose course was well on towards completion. The riding-school portion of their work is carried on in strict privacy, and it is accounted a great privilege to be allowed to witness it from the gallery. Thanks however to the kind-

ness of Colonel Onslow, the superintendent of the establishment (an officer whose name is well known in connection with the good work he accomplished with the Army Gymnasia), and Major Jones, the riding-master (to whose kind offices much of my information is due), a good opportunity was afforded me of seeing all that was to be seen in connection with the Irish ride.

A word of explanation may here be necessary. For convenience the men are split up into three rides—the Guards, Hussars, and the Irish rides. The first includes all the “heavies,” the second the “light-bobs,” and the last the men of regiments stationed in the Emerald Isle.

Theoretically these are the distinctions, but in practice it is found to be impossible to strictly adhere to them. Consequently there may be found Hussars in the Guards’ ride, and very frequently the Irish contingent has to be reinforced by men from other sections.

To attempt to describe in detail a military ride so as to be understood of the many would be a futile task. It would entail the using of so many technical terms, which would render the description almost incomprehensible if left unexplained, while to translate them into colloquial English would be wearisome in the extreme. Besides, every one has seen a musical ride, and an ordinary ride differs little from this, barring of course the fact that it is accompanied by no inspiring strains. Sufficient then to say that the course the men go through is not dissimilar to that undergone by a recruit, with the additional difficulty that the horse has to be taken through *his* novice’s course at the same time. They have to ride on a saddle without stirrups and go over the jumps under similar conditions, and in fact to show a perfect mastery of their animals in every way.

This is not always displayed in the execution of the most complicated figures, which, after the general idea is committed to memory, are comparatively simple. Indeed

it is in the accomplishment of what appear to be perfectly simple moves that perfect horsemanship has often to be called into play.

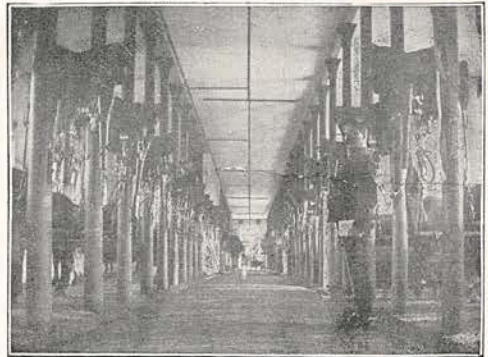
Perhaps the surest test of a good rider is to be seen in the movement with which the cantering lesson usually concludes. It simply consists in pulling up from a swinging canter into a trot. The horses are momentarily stopped and are then started off at a trot; the difficulty is to prevent them dropping into a canter again. It looks so extremely simple that even when every man in the ride does it correctly it scarcely evokes a round of applause at the Tournament, while the showier but really far

easier feats (the character of some of which will be seen from the illustrations) are cheered to the echo.

It used to be the custom on a man going back to his regiment after completing the course to take the horse he had trained back with him. This has now been discontinued, and the horses are retained for the use of the dépôt. Exceptions are to be found in the Household Cavalry,



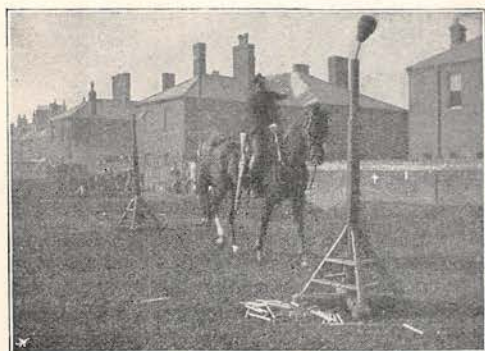
MAJOR JONES.
(Riding-master.)



THE NEW STABLES.

Engineers and Artillery, who still follow the old rule.

While taking the riding-school course the men are also going through the dismounted



CUTTING THE TURK'S HEAD.

work, and almost from the very beginning they commence to qualify as instructors by drilling the recruits in the *dépôt*. For the first six months their efforts in this direction are confined to dismounted drill; when efficient at this they pass on to the direction of recruits' rides, in everything being superintended by the riding-master and the establishment staff.

And this brings me to the school of assistants. These are the men from whom the riding masters are supplied. They are filled by selection from a list kept by the adjutant-general, the number of names on this roll being four.

When a vacancy occurs recommendations are sent in by the commanding officers of cavalry regiments both at home and abroad, and the names of the candidates being submitted to the commandant, he picks out a warrant or non-commissioned officer for approval by the adjutant-general.

The qualifications necessary for the men who aspire to these coveted posts are fairly high. They must have previously been through a class and obtained first-class certificates as horsemen and instructors. In addition they must now possess first-class certificates of education—a condition which still further augments the standard.

When a vacancy occurs for a riding-master this is filled from among the assistants who are at the establishment at the time, and usually the selection is made by seniority.

The method of appointing riding-masters in the Household Cavalry is slightly different; they are always, if possible, made from men belonging to the particular regiment in which the vacancy occurs. The non-commissioned officer selected has, before being appointed, to go through a short special course of instruction, for which he receives a

certificate of his capacity from the commandant and the superintendent of the establishment at Canterbury.

When no eligible candidate is forthcoming from the Household Cavalry the vacancy may be filled by a line candidate, but in this case the commanding officer has the right of furnishing the name of a non-commissioned officer for the adjutant-general's roll, who afterwards, when duly qualified, is eligible for appointment as riding master to a line corps.

The stables occupied by the horses and the men going through the course will repay a visit. They furnish models of what army horses and accoutrements should be. Each sergeant has a batman who looks after him, but the corporals do their own horses. There is no supervision of a tiresome kind, it being left to the men's own sense of honour to look after their horses well and keep their saddles clean and in good condition.

Belonging as they do to different regiments and anxious to do them credit, it can easily be understood that a good-natured rivalry exists, which is fraught with far more satisfactory results than could otherwise be produced by the most rigorous system of surveillance. What is known as "the powder and paint system" adopted by some corps is discountenanced here; no wax or composition is used for saddlery. It is simply cleaned with soap and water and looks a great deal better than when covered with a greasy coating of wax, which too often only serves to cover the dirt beneath. Certainly the establishment stables would put in the shade those of any corps in the service.

The *dépôt* is so bound up with the establishment that it is hardly possible to deal with the one without touching to some extent upon the other. To adequately deal with the *dépôt* would infringe upon my limitations of space, but I cannot refrain



A CLEAN CUT.

from noticing some of the most striking features which were pointed out to me by Colonel Onslow as he accompanied me on a tour of inspection.

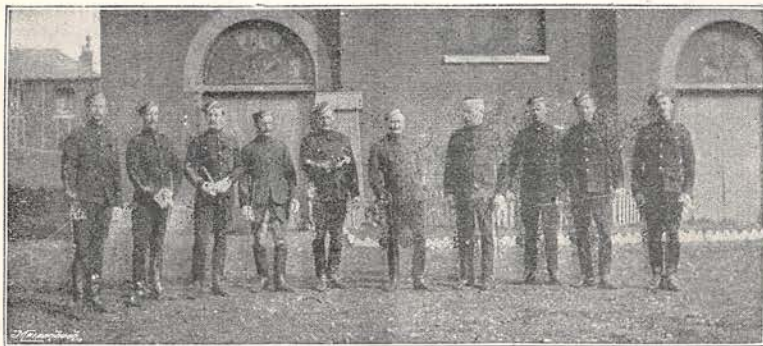
Thanks to Colonel Abadie, C.B., great strides have been made here in the direction of farthering the military enlightenment and comfort of the troops. A novel idea is to be seen carried out in the stables, and a very excellent one it is too. In each stable (and also barrack-room) hangs a large diagram showing the anatomy of the horse, with a list appended giving the correct names for all the different parts. The necessity for this will be seen when it is borne in mind that by far the greater proportion of recruits have never had anything to do with "the long-faced 'uns" prior to their enlistment.

Much care has been bestowed upon the arrangements for providing the recruits with suitable food. The messing is unequalled, and fine supper-rooms are a feature of the dépôt. The scale of charges is very moderate, so that for a trifling sum a well cooked meal can be obtained. They have become very popular with the men; bright and cosy they offer a powerful counter-attraction to the all too enticing allurements of the canteen. They are worked on the self-supporting principle, and all the profits go back to the men by various channels. They furnish a

pleasant contrast to many of the coffee-shops to be seen in regimental stations, and one wonders that, considering the excellent results of good management in this department, the example is not more extensively followed. To Captain Knox, the adjutant, the credit for the inception and carrying out of the idea is, I understand, mainly due.

Taken altogether, perhaps nothing struck me so forcibly as the high level of conduct which seems to prevail at the establishment. One misses perhaps something of that hearty, rollicking spirit which was at one time so characteristic of the cavalryman, but its place has been taken by something better, something more in keeping with the spirit of the age. There is more sobriety, a higher sense of responsibility, and a finer sense of consideration for subordinates.

The old system of brutality and roughness, when a choice stock of oaths was held to be part and parcel of a rough rider's equipment, has in the main passed into the limbo of things forgotten. The rough rider of today is no more perfect than was he of former times an unmitigated bully. But that in almost every respect he is, generally speaking, a vast improvement upon his predecessor I have no hesitation in affirming. And that is the best tribute that can be paid to the 'Stab.



COLONEL ONSLOW, MAJOR JONES, AND ASSISTANTS.



AT THE ROYAL MILITARY TOURNAMENT IN THE AGRICULTURAL HALL, ISLINGTON.