

GERMAN INFLUENCE ON BRITISH CAVALRY

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German influence on British cavalry by Erskine Childers

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ERSKINE CHILDERS

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BY

ERSKINE CHILDERS

AUTHOR OF

"WAR AND THE ARME BLANCHE," "THE RIDDLE OF THE SANDS,"
"IN THE RANKS OF THE C.I.V."
EDITOR OF VOL. V. OF "THE 'TIMES' HISTORY OF THE WAR"

LONDON
EDWARD ARNOLD

1911

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PREFACE

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THIS essay is meant to be read in connection with the facts and arguments adduced in my book of last year, "War and the *Arme Blanche*," with its Introduction by Field-Marshal Lord Roberts. From the nature of the case I have not been able to avoid a small measure of repetition, but I have done my best to confine myself to new ground.

A word about my object in writing again. Contemporaneously with the publication of "War and the *Arme Blanche*," General von Bernhardt published in Germany his "Reiterdienst," and an English edition, translated by Major G. T. M. Bridges, D.S.O., under the title "Cavalry in War and Peace," appeared simultaneously in this country. Like its predecessor, "Unsere Kaval-lerie im nächsten Kriege" (translated under the title "Cavalry in Future Wars"), this new book by General von Bernhardt was headed with a

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highly laudatory Preface from the pen of General Sir John French, who commended it to military students in this country as a brilliant and authoritative treatise on the employment of Cavalry in modern war. It was included in the valuable "*Pall Mall Series*" of military books, published by Hugh Rees and Co.; and, in short, unless the critical faculties and native common-sense of Englishmen can be aroused, it is likely to become a standard work. There exists, be it remembered, no similar work, modern and authoritative, by a British author.

My object in this essay is to arouse those critical faculties and that common-sense. Without any disrespect to General von Bernhardt, who writes, not for Englishmen, but, as a German reformer, for what he regards as an exceptionally backward Cavalry, I wish to show, not only that we have nothing to learn even from him in the matter of Cavalry combat, but that, if we only have the pluck and independence to break off the demoralizing habit of imitating foreign models, and to build on our own war experience and our own racial aptitudes, we have the power of creating a Cavalry incomparably superior in quality to any Continental Cavalry.

The indispensable condition precedent to that revival is to sweep away root and branch the tactical system founded on the lance and sword, and to create a new system founded on the rifle.

I shall endeavour to show, using von Bernhardt's "Reiterdienst," with Sir John French's Introduction, and our own official Manuals, as my text, that in the matter of modern Cavalry warfare no principles worthy of the name exist among professional men. The whole subject is in a state of chaos, to which, I believe, there is no parallel in all the arts of war and peace. And the cause of that chaos is the retention in theory of a form of combat which is in flagrant contradiction with the conditions exacted by modern fire-arms, and is utterly discredited by the facts of modern war.

The excellence of the translation furnished by Major Bridges has made it unnecessary for me to introduce into this essay the various terms and phrases used in the original German text. After a study of that text, I am satisfied, if Major Bridges will permit me to say so, that, obscure as the author's exposition often is, no part of the obscurity is due to the translator. I have not found a technical term of which he has not given the correct English equivalent, or a passage where

he has not accurately interpreted the original sense.

Let me add that I have been encouraged further to write this essay by the keen and instructive controversy which followed the publication of my book of last year. Incidentally I have taken the opportunity in this volume to reply to some of the criticisms against its predecessor, and to clear up some points which I think were not fully understood.

E. C.

March, 1911.

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