THE QUESTION OF THE GUNS AS NOW DEBATED. PP. 3-50

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PREFACE.

THE WRITER of these pages has been associated with the subject of Rifled Artillery for many years.

In 1862–63 he followed closely the investigations of the Parliamentary Ordnance Committee. In 1864–65 he attended the experiments of the Armstrong and Whitworth Committee, of which he became a member.

In 1866 he began his practical acquaintance with Foreign Artillery by attending a trial of the Krüpp 9-inch gun in Russia, and sitting at a discussion of the Artillery Committee there—a privilege accorded to him in Austria also.

Since that date his intercourse with leading Continental artillerists, as well as with our own Ordnance Departments, has been active and unbroken.

As a member of the Elswick firm, he has special knowledge of and natural bias towards the artillery of Sir W. Armstrong, including under that head the

modifications which constitute what is known as the Woolwich system. But his present object is a fair statement of the general question, and not the advocacy of any particular system.

His acquaintance with Gunnery at home and abroad being real, personal, and of long standing, will, it is hoped, gain for him a hearing.

June 14, 1875.

I.

ANYONE who desires to take a comprehensive survey of the Artillery of Europe and America, should at once see that the question,—Which is the best Gun, and in what country has Artillery made the most progress—is eminently a practical one, and that the investigation, practice, and experience of this country in regard to Heavy and Naval Ordnance exceed those of all other countries put together. Next, he should perceive that no country claims to have the best possible gun. The pattern adopted by each is in every case the result of compromise, and of a nice adjustment of the balance of advantage and disadvantage, as viewed by the respective Ordnance authorities, and as well from a political and economical as from a technical point of view. Then he must take into account that no country has been so unfettered in its choice, either by economical considerations, or want of mechanical skill, experience, and productive power, as this country.

Further, he should recognise the advantage of England, due to its priority of start in the investigation, and

the greater incitement to which this country is subjected, from the fact that the Gun question is really more vital to this, the chief maritime and industrial Power of the world, than to any of the chief military Powers of Europe. There is yet another circumstance attending the relative position of England and other countries to which due weight should be given. It was in England first that the leading civilian mechanics took up Gunnery, and broke down in a very large measure the natural jealousy of extraneous aid and intervention, and the exclusiveness of the Military and Naval Services. Since that date there has been—in spite of the existence here of Government manufactories—free-trade in gunnery to an extent unparalleled abroad, where the policy appears still to rule, that there is danger in encouraging civilian interference and manufacturing rivalry, and in permitting the character of adopted weapons to be lightly assailed. Here, the accepted system has had to push its way to the front in open, fair, and general fight, and is still pursued by even distanced competitors as well as fresh rivals, who, however hostile to one another's views, combine heartily, and by their combination acquire strength, in attacks on the Government system, whenever, as must often occur, the smallest opening offers itself. Moreover, the interest of the public in Gunnery questions, which is far more lively here than elsewhere, the ability of the journalists, the ease with which every adverse fact is elicited by means of Parliamentary returns (unknown abroad), all keep

alive a constant excitement. They furnish to a foreign critic ample material for discrediting our whole course of conduct in Gunnery, and they undoubtedly do much to mislead our neighbours if not ourselves. Yet of course they are stimulants, and keep our authorities and manufacturers incessantly active and alert.

Again, it should not be difficult to see that two dominant principles have guided the various authorities, who have from time to time ruled the question of Artillery in this country—viz., security in the guns, and simplicity in their working and equipment. Almost all the mystery about Gunnery is now, happily, dissipated. The principles upon and within which velocity, range, penetration, accuracy, shell-power, &c., are obtained are now generally understood, and the day for secret nostrums is nearly over. Given a certain weight of material, these qualities in the required proportion or combination can be secured to a gun without recourse to any magic as to metal, rifling, or loading, and subject to scientific principles well established and clearly formulated. But while such qualities are within comparatively easy reach, and by various ways, security still continues the vital and critical characteristic of a rifled cannon. In whatever form moulded towards the ends required, the gun must be moulded strong enough—must be secure.

Now, if this country desired a secure construction, a strong and reliable gun, certainly it had also, beyond all other countries, the power to obtain what it wanted. It

was free to choose amongst all known metals and methods of manufacture, and to this day remains free. Meanwhile, distinguished advocates of every material and system of construction have never been wanting to the country, and neither time nor money has been stinted in the investigation of their propositions and in the trials of their guns. To this day no country has made such effective use of cast-iron for modern artillery as we have in the case of the Palliser guns, while there is nothing whatever to show that the steel guns of Sir Joseph Whitworth are inferior in material or manufacture to any steel guns in the world. Yet, with a free choice before us, and the freest and fullest investigation behind us, we have adhered to the wrought-iron coil construction of Sir W. Armstrong for our guns; and of the honesty, at any rate, of our decision there can be no ground for question.

Compare this position of ours with that of other countries. It is certain that no other Government can obtain at home the wrought-iron coiled guns.* Their choice

* A French writer, discussing the different systems of manufacture in Europe and America, says, 'All honour is due to Sir William Armstrong for the coil principle by which he has well upheld the honour of the metallurgists of England'; and 'the solution he has given to the problem is to be found in the profound knowledge possessed in England of how to work wrought-iron.'

'In other countries they can make cast-iron and steel, but it is thought that it is only in England that they know how to work wrought-iron; and if it can be shown that laminated iron, forged and adapted in a certain way, is the best material for guns, the