

THE DRUM-MAJOR.

BY GUSTAV KOBBE.

WHEN I was a boy in New York, as many of us youngsters walked in front of a procession as there were soldiers in it. The platoon of mounted police which now clears the street for blocks ahead, was then—and it was not so many years ago, either—unknown; for there was no mounted police. Those were the days before a State uniform was required, and each regiment wore a uniform of its own. The famous Seventh were attired like chasseurs; there were zouaves, and a whole regiment of cavalry, and separate corps, like the Gardes Lafayette, who wore blue coats and red trousers, and were preceded by sappers with gleaming axes, bearskin caps, and long white aprons—not to mention two German regiments whose uniforms were not unlike those of the Prussian service.

They made a motley procession, but not more motley than the vanguard of boys, the tallest among us marching in the lead and swinging one of his father's sticks like a drum-major. To us the real drum-major seemed little more than an ornament and a harlequin, a soldier-acrobat who would have been as much in place in a circus as at the head of a regiment. The drum-majors were fine-looking fellows then, as now; tall and shapely, their natural height increased by their great bearskin caps, so that they all seemed sprung from a race of giants. Whenever the drum-corps had been playing for some time, we would look back impatient for the drum-major's signal to the band. How it thrilled us to see his stick flourish in the air; and when, as he brought it down, the band broke in upon the drums with a crashing chord, our forms straightened up and our steps became more buoyant! In those days I thought the duties of the drum-major were limited to squelching alternately the drum-corps and the band, and between times looking as large and handsome as possible. But, while the drum-major cannot, under any circum-

stances, be said to have been born to blush unseen, he performs many duties of which the looker-on at a street-parade knows nothing. It requires a visit to a State camp or a United States Army post to learn what the tall man in the bearskin hat has to do. For there he is busy even when he is n't on show.

The drum-major is to the band what the first sergeant is to a company. He drills the musicians in marching, sees that they are rightly equipped, that the brasses are bright and the music in order. The band, of course, practises under the band-leader, but the drum-major has full charge of the field music—the trumpeters and the drum-and-fife corps. In fact, the drum-major derives his name from the fact that he was formerly the chief drummer of the regiment. He has been an ornament of the British army since the reign of Charles II., and has long flourished in the continental services. He is *tambour-major* in the French army, and he went by the same name in the German service until the gradual giving up of French terms after the Franco-German war converted him into the *Regiments-trommler*,—the regimental drummer,—a term which well expresses the original duties of the office, but lacks the swing of “drum-major” and “tambour-major.” And what is a drum-major without swing?

At “parade,” at an army post, or State camp, the drum-major leads the band and field music to the front, and brings it to a halt facing the color-line. At the approach of the adjutant he gives the command, “Open ranks,” and, when the arms have been inspected, “Close ranks.” He then marches the band back to its place on the color-line.

The drum-major's uniform is usually the gayest in the regiment. A striking bit of color, and aiguillettes,* combine with the bearskin hat to make him one of the most picturesque features of a parade, especially if he has been selected

* The tagged points or braid hanging from the shoulder in some military uniforms.

for his height and his soldierly bearing. Drum-major Ludwig Jorgensen, of the battalion of engineers at Willet's Point, is among the most striking-looking drum-majors in the regular army. With his bearskin hat he stands seven feet eight inches, or within four inches of eight feet. He carries a heavy staff about four and a half feet long, with a large head and long ferule. This staff is considerably longer than the usual short bamboo loaded in the center, and hence is better adapted for signaling commands to the band and field music, though the shorter stick is easier to twirl. A clever trick with these short sticks is for two drum-majors to stand some distance apart, twirl their sticks in front of them, and then let go, each drum-major catching the other's stick and returning it to him in the same way.

The drum-major's uniform is so gorgeous because his imagination is not fettered by the United States Army regulations, he being allowed to wear any uniform which his colonel considers appropriate. He will usually have three or four uniforms, changing them according to his fancy. You see he is the artist of the regiment, and so is allowed some freedom in dress. The drum-major ranks as a sergeant, but no regular sergeant in the United States Army could get himself up as Drum-major Jorgensen does, with a red breast-piece of Prussian Uhlan (Lancer) pattern, a broad gold and white band, gold epaulets, and aiguillettes, to say nothing of the towering bearskin hat.

Like poets, drum-majors are born, not made. One man may become a drum-major in a week, while you can't make one of another in a lifetime. Without the knack of handling the stick he will never be an artist, and will, probably at the very moment when he should look his jauntiest, commit the crime, unpardonable in a drum-major, of dropping his left hand to his side. For the left hand should always, except in two-handed movements with the staff, rest, knuckles up, on the hip. Thus the drum-major's pose, when not marching or giving a command, is to stand with his left hand on his hip, his right hand grasping his stick just below the head, the point of the stick resting on the ground. He presents a fine, imposing figure as he stands there, erect and tall,

two paces in front of the band. Now comes the moment, so glorious to the small boy, when the commands "Play" and "Forward—March" are to be given. Facing the band the drum-major, with a quick turn of the wrist, points the ferule upward, letting it slant a little to the right. Then, raising his staff to the height of his chin, he thrusts it the full length of his arm to the right, and draws it back again. This is the signal to play. Then, turning, he points the staff to the front, thrusts it the full length of his arm forward, and music and march begin. In the old days the drum-major then brought the "cane," as the staff was called in the tactics, to the position of "carry sword." Now the drum-major beats time, setting the "cadence"—the number of steps to a minute—of the march. As a rule he simply repeats again and again the thrust and recover, through which he gives the command to play. Expert drum-majors, however, introduce some fancy movement here. Jorgensen, for instance, has a pretty way of describing a circle from the front to the back of his right shoulder, grasping the staff in the middle and twirling it so that the head points downward at the moment the left foot is to advance. In unskilful hands this movement is apt to end in disaster, the ferule striking the drum-major's back or nose—which puts the nose out of joint and the band out of time.

It is important that the drum-major should mark the cadence correctly, as otherwise, not only his own, but all other regiments following, will march too slowly or too rapidly. The regular cadence is 120 steps to the minute; but in Memorial Day parades, when there are many veterans in the procession, the drum-majors quietly reduce it to ninety. Another clever trick of the drum-major is to seize the ferule between the fore and middle fingers, swing a full circle with it four or five times, and let go, giving it a slight twist as it leaves his fingers.

The drum-major who gets the knack of the twist and knows enough to allow for the number of steps he will advance, can make his staff circle high up in front of him and sail down into his hand again.

When the band is to execute an oblique movement, the drum-major holds his staff in a

horizontal position at the height of his neck, and pointing the ferule in the direction of the oblique, extends his arm to its full length. The prettiest evolution of the band is the counter-march. The drum-major "faces the music" and gives the signal to march, but instead of turning remains standing with his face toward the band. The band marches upon the drum-

fighting men. In battle they aid the ambulance corps. It would be queer tactics to use smokeless powder to prevent the foe from detecting your position, and then have the band tooting away on your line of battle!

The armies of the world are becoming less and less ornamental. The uniforms are plainer than formerly, so that the soldier may not be



FROM PHOTOGRAPHS USED BY PERMISSION OF W. R. KING, LIEUTENANT-COLONEL, U. S. A., BATTALION OF ENGINEERS AT WILLET'S POINT, LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK.

major, but on reaching him the file leaders to the right of him wheel to the right, those on the left to the left, the drum-major marching down through the center. To signal for halt the tall man in the bearskin cap raises the staff with both hands in a horizontal position above his head, and with arms extended drops it to a horizontal position at the height of his hips. With the staff he also indicates to the field music what signal it is to play, and puts the drum-corps through the manual: for instance, "Put up the drum-sticks,"—"Detach the drums,"—"Ground the drums."

The drum-major and the musicians are not

an easier target for the enemy, and in other ways the actual needs of the service have overcome the mere notions of the parade-ground. But the drum-major remains. He has his special rôle. He gives a theatrical touch to a review which otherwise it would lack, and, lacking, sadly miss. He is the last of all the old-time "fancy touches," and may his days still be long! Like the conductor of an orchestra, he sets the pace. A regiment with a jaunty drum-major will never lack buoyancy and snap.

And so, though a non-combatant, the drum-major is the bravest-looking of all.