VOLUNTEER RIFLE CORPS.

EXETER MEETING.

In pursuance of a requisition, the Mayor (Capt. Tanner) convened a meeting at the Guildhall, on Thursday (yesterday), at one o'clock, to consider the circular recently addressed to the Lord Lieutenants of the County inviting the formation of Volunteer Corps, and to adopt measures for placing the establishment of the Exeter and South Devon Volunteer Rifle Corps "on a footing commensurate with the importance and ancient reputation of the city."

Upwards of 200 persons attended the meeting, but evinced no great enthusiasm for volunteering.

The Mayor took the chair, and among those present were—Earl of Devon, E. Divett, Esq., M.P., R. S. Gard, Esq., M.P., Rev. Chancellor Martin, Rev. Chancellor Harrington, Colonel Harding, Major Millidge, Major Sheppard, Mr. J. Kendell, Mr. J. Daw, Mr. J. C. Wilcocks, Mr. F. Franklin, Mr. W. D. Moore, Mr. Lattimer, Mr. B. Kingdon, Mr. Bartlett, Mr. R. C. Parsons, Mr. Hoskins, Mr. G. Truscott, Mr. Harris (surgeon), Mr. J. Passmore, Mr. C. Turner, Mr. Gidley (Town Clerk), Mr. Brake, Mr. E. Force, Mr. W. Cole, Mr. Williams, Mr. Pasmore.

The Mayor, in commencing the business, stated that the present meeting had been called at the requisition of many influential inhabitants of the city, in consequence of her Majesty's appeal to the patriotism and loyalty of her subjects for the establishment of volunteer rifle corps throughout the kingdom, for the purpose of increasing strength and sure defence of our country against the possible contingency of any foreign aggression, in order that by a well-ordered military organization, we might be in a condition to forbid any insult, and to deter or repel any hostile attempt at invasion of our peaceful shores. He had no doubt that they would not permit measure of self defence, at the present eventful crisis, when the nations of Europe were in arms, and engaged in actual warfare, to be unquestionable; and he should be necessary for this call upon the nation was manifested by the universal readiness and true English spirit with which the appeal had been responded to throughout the land. At a time like the present, when nations were thus arrayed against each other, and mighty armies were in battle array against our national destruction, it was a great satisfaction for us to know that England took no part with the belligerents, as we know that England took no part with the belligerents, but had resolved to observe and maintain a pacific policy of neutrality. While supported by this wise resolution, under God's Providence, we must not neglect the duty of taking proper means for our defence; for though it had often been sung of old that—

"Britannia needs no bulwarks,
No towers upon the steep,
Her march lies o'er the ocean wave,
Her home is on the deep"—

Yet, times were changed, for the application of steam, power, and modern science by land and sea, had caused a great revolution in the art of war, and it was necessary, a far greater amount of vigilance and watchfulness on our part to guard our coasts. Owing to steam ships, and the power of the rifled gun, we were now brought into close contact with France, and the British Channel was become little more than a tiny river of separation; but he was glad to say that our steam navy was put on a war footing, and our seamen were not found wanting—hear, hear! Still, under all circumstances, it was but right we should have our rifle ready and keep our powder dry—(hear, hear, —and so organize sharpshooters that they might be ready at a moment's notice and rally round the flag of emergency. It was true, indeed, that

"God hath in mercy blessed our shore,
Beyond all kinds earl.
So may he grant one blessing more,
And shield us from this ill."

That was the prayer of every honest English heart, and he hoped that God would vouchsafe the continuance of His manifold mercies to our land for many years to come.

Mr. Divett, M.P., was loudly cheered on rising to propose the first resolution. He commenced by saying that he really felt he was not exactly in a position to do that justice to the resolution which it deserved, because not having had an opportunity of making himself acquainted with the plans that had been formed, or the arrangements that had been proposed, he was not enabled to discuss them. At the same time, he entertained a very strong opinion as to the necessity of the present movement, and he could as shortly as possible give them the grounds on which that opinion was formed. He was present in the House on the time, and it seemed that he was, and that it was almost the first thing that he could recollect, that he was told that in the event of an invasion he should be put on a horse and sent away—(a laugh). Almost the first recollection that he (Mr. Divett) had, as a child, was being put on a pony in his grandfather's at Woodbury, to see the sham practice there—he could not say the rifle practice, for they were firing shotguns at the mark, and they called it the practice "Brown Bess." At that time there were some thousand men posted on Woodbury Hill, and along the coast there were small stations all prepared for the event of under the idea that the enemy would land some day. He remembered that on the occasion of the first review of the Exeter Engineers, he was ready to be ignited, and to alarm the country around in the event of a sudden invasion taking place. Now, although he was a Peace Member, he was not one to be afraid of fearing a present invasion of our shores, still events were occurring which rendered it necessary that precautions should be taken at this moment, and he thought it was a great opinion of their land—(cheers). His friend the mayor had alluded to the effect of the application of steam power upon war, and he had no hesitation in saying—indeed, it was almost become an axiom of military science—that great as were the powers of steam, the rifle, as a weapon, were equally great for the purposes of aggression—(hear, hear)—for it would be possible for an enemy, with a large army landed, by means of steam, to concentrate an enormous force on any particular point of a coast, at any given moment, and without any possibility of steam afloat, by equal means of resisting the force thus concentrated. The aggressive powers of steam were, therefore, greater than its defensive powers, and therefore it behoved them to prepare for accidents of this nature. With respect to his particular locality there was, he affirmed, none in England so liable to the incursions of the French as the borough of Exeter—(cheers). He had no hesitation in saying this, and he was confirmed in his opinion by a conversation that had taken place between himself and the Engineer, Sir Fredk. Smith, to whom, in the course of conversation, he had suggested that a battery ought to be placed at the mouth of the Exe, and that there should be a few martello towers, armed with a few of Armstrong's guns, which would render it impossible for an enemy to land (hear, hear) and land troops there; but at present it was quite possible for an enemy's steamer to enter the Exe, land her troops, and forthwith be at the gates of Exeter, and be in the city before they could be checked—(hear, hear). There was very little preparation to resist such an attempt, and it behoved them, as a community, to do all in their power to ward off the horrors of war, which, under certain circumstances, their wives and children might be exposed to. He believed that such an organization as that of Rifle Corps, would be one of the most powerful means of averting a calamity such as that he was speaking of—(cheers). Reverting to the state of the country generally, he expressed his regret at the effect which the arms lately invented would probably have upon warfare. They would, if they wished to give liberty to Italy—as he said—(a laugh)—had spoken about those "arms of precision," and he had said that they were useful at a distance, but were no substitute for the bayonet. As far as disciplined soldiers were concerned, there was nothing like the bayonet—(cheers)—but as respected volunteers who necessarily required greater distance, they could go through to meet regular soldiers in the field, there was nothing like the rifle—(cheers). He had heard that this weapon was the one of all others—the use of which should be cultivated in our country—(cheers). He had attended the manœuvres in the south of Switzerland, and when he was younger and had better eyes than he had now, he was a tolerable shot himself, and he saw no reason why Englishmen should not master that weapon equally as well as the inhabitants of those countries which he had mentioned. He was sure that the use of the rifle was an affair of education, and every Swiss and every Tyrolese understood it. With reference to education of the rifle he was sure that he was well received a letter from his son the other day, in which he mentioned the fact that Cambridge was one of the first places in which the rifle was introduced as a study. He added that he hoped that Cambridge would become by and bye the first school of musketry in the kingdom; and indeed there was a natural connection, for the rifle at Cambridge was the first school of mathematics in the land, and as the science of practical mathematics was the man who studied mathematics, he could see no reason why the students might not add to their knowledge of the theory of the rifle, in practical exposition of it, by the use of the rifle, in preparation for the defence of their country, should that ever be necessary. He had understood that the subject before the meeting—the formation of a rifle corps—he would simply say that he would not advocate the adoption of any uniform, but that it should be one of a practical utility, and above all to direct attention less to drilling than to rifle practice—(hear, hear). For this practice it was necessary to have a good ground, and he did not know that sufficient distance could be obtained on any ground in this neighbourhood; but he knew of places a little farther off, where, with the permission of Mr. Rolle, who was the owner of the property, ranges of 1400 or 1500 yards, could be obtained, and he believed that they could not get a range of more than 1000 yards near Exeter, but it was necessary for them, if they would handle the weapon properly, to have a long range. Many, however, had not sight equal to shooting an object at that distance, but those who had, should practise accordingly, for the distance of the object was depended on the distance at which it could be made effective. There was a time when they were taught to think that it was impossible that England could be attacked within its own shores; he thought it might be made impossible; but he did not think it impossible at this time. He was not about to say anything concerning the conduct of foreign nations; for it was as well to avoid that; but it was yet a comfort to themselves that England had not had raised large armies and armaments, and some trifling affair, some trumpery squabble, some accident of diplomacy, might serve to turn them upon England, and it was incumbent upon us to prepare for that possible event. The expense of mounting a sufficient force of Englishmen to protect ourselves, was a strong objection to that course being adopted, and it became the duty of the mass of the people to hold themselves armed against the worst contingency. He remembered when he was a young man, travelling on the continent, that he saw an inscription—he really forgot exactly, where it was—but it was over the gateway to the entrance to some fortified town in the Netherlands—if he should happen to be wrong in his quotation, he trusted to his revered friend (Chancellor Martin) to correct him, for he was very rusty now in his Latin, and still more so in his Greek. The inscription was, "Hodie mihi, cras tibi. Hodie mihi, cras tibi." "If you desire peace, be always prepared for war!" (Turning to the Chancellor) Was he right in his quotation? Chancellor Martin—It is very correct—(laughter).

Mr. Divett said that the passage at the time struck him very much, because, possessed with some of those utopian ideas which young men sometimes held, and which they heard held sometimes by peace societies, composed of very well intentioned people, but whose judgment they had from all experience was very much at fault, he entertained the notion that the long continuance of peace would have a tendency to diminish the chances of war. He found he was at fault there; for he had seen that the long continuance of peace, instead of reducing the chances of war—although, on the one side of the Channel, it was a great gain, yet, when an accident occurred which tended to produce war that generation, who had not experienced the horrors, the miseries, and the wastefulness of war, was but too apt to rush into it for the sake of temporary excitement—(hear, hear). He confessed that what he had seen since he was a boy had convinced him that human nature was the same, and would be the same at all times; whether armies were in the hands of despots, or in the hands of the people, the passions of the people on the side of the Atlantic, the passions of men were such that they might have an outbreak at any time, and he would add, that if *Si sic omnes* had been the mayor had put into his hands a full dressed rifleman—(laughter). He did not understand enough to say what was the best rifle for a rifleman; but his noble friend, Lord Elcho, wrote a letter lately to the papers, strongly recommending "Knickerbockers"—(laughter). If they had dressed up a corps in Knickerbockers, and had drilled them a half a dozen or eight, they would want in the shape of sergeants major some few men, who might be obtained at a moderate expense, and would be very useful in the way of drill—(hear, hear). After apologising for taking part in the proceedings the noble earl resumed his seat amidst loud applause.

Mr. C. Turner proposed the following resolution:

"That for this purpose a Committee of citizens not necessarily members of the Corporation be appointed to carry out the Queen's patriotic suggestions, both from the public and from intended members of the Corps, and to frame such regulations and arrangements as the Lord Lieutenants, and to pay over to the proper officer of the Corps, a sum sufficient to defray the necessary preliminary expenses, and to make such resolutions, such Committee to consist of the following gentlemen with power to add to their number—namely, the Mayor, the Recorder, the Mayor, High Sheriff, Col. Harding, Mr. Kendall, Mr. Blackmore, Mr. Hoskins, Mr. Bartlett, Mr. Harris, Mr. C. C. Turner, Mr. W. D. Moore, and Mr. Pasmore.

He said that they had heard from the noble Earl that it was important to constitute a good committee, and that was important of the importance of the Corps. The gentlemen who could not bear rifles, but were veterans like himself, might be placed as members on that committee, which, he trusted, would be found to be a good one, and to do its duty in the city. He promised that, for his own part he would devote all his energies to the cause, and he should feel it his duty to attend. He hoped they would help to form a strong committee.

Chancellor Harrington rose most readily and willingly to second the proposition that had been made. It must at first sight appear strange that he, a man of peace, should come forward to second a resolution which had for its object the formation of a body of men possessed of deadly weapons, and under certain circumstances to be called upon to use them against their fellow-creatures. Such a consideration would tell them that the clergy were the proper men to come forward, and he was one of the first to do so, although he had always disliked fighting even as a boy—(laughter). He had always thought it troublesome, and as he had learned many years ago that it was the strongest argument of all to them, fighting would occur as long as human nature remained weak and wicked as it was, and he always felt when fighting must come, the strongest argument of fighting was to fight—(cheers and laughter). They might call him "coward," but they must admit he was a peaceable coward—(laughter).

Mr. Moore thought the time had now come for him to say a few words on what he called the "parish" business of the city, and in order that the House might be saved the trouble of going over the ground of the present corps seven years ago—at a time when there were expectations, as at present, of the parties to disturb the country—he had, in the first place, a rifle corps was established in this district, and in the following year a corps was established in London; but all other places were denied the privilege of bearing arms for their country. The corps formed in this district was called, "Lord Rolle's Volunteers," and was composed of tenantry, and was founded on feelings delicating its purpose to be this—a practical expression of the feeling of loyalty to our Queen, and of the feeling of attachment to our laws and institutions, and in order to afford scope for the services of a large portion of the community who could not pass into the ranks of the army, and who could not pass into the ranks of the navy, and who could not be placed in a room in that branch of her Majesty's service, as officers, their corps was established as a part of a system of defensive organization, and it was the professional men, merchants, tradesmen, and respectable inhabitants of the district, of which the corps was formed, and the duties of its operations was bounded by Somerset and Dorset, from the neighbourhood of Bampton to the coast on the north-east, and by the Dart, from Moretonhampstead to the west, and from thence to Bampton on the north-west. When the corps was first formed, it was a matter of confidence to the country, and it was put down in one morning; but he grieved to say that only 7 out of that number remained at present members of the corps, and he was sorry to say that there was not a single man who steadily and firmly assisted in the formation of the corps, and who had been with the corps uninterruptedly, and had proved himself a good and faithful member of the corps—(hear, hear). The corps was established in the year 1803, and was founded on resolutions defining its purpose to be this—a practical expression of the feeling of loyalty to our Queen, and of the feeling of attachment to our laws and institutions, and in order to afford scope for the services of a large portion of the community who could not pass into the ranks of the army, and who could not pass into the ranks of the navy, and who could not be placed in a room in that branch of her Majesty's service, as officers, their corps was established as a part of a system of defensive organization, and it was the professional men, merchants, tradesmen, and respectable inhabitants of the district, of which the corps was formed, and the duties of its operations was bounded by Somerset and Dorset, from the neighbourhood of Bampton to the coast on the north-east, and by the Dart, from Moretonhampstead to the west, and from thence to Bampton on the north-west. When the corps was first formed, it was a matter of confidence to the country, and it was put down in one morning; but he grieved to say that only 7 out of that number remained at present members of the corps, and he was sorry to say that there was not a single man who steadily and firmly assisted in the formation of the corps, and who had been with the corps uninterruptedly, and had proved himself a good and faithful member of the corps—(hear, hear). The corps was called Rolle's Volunteers, and was composed of tenantry