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# OBSERVATIONS ON SWORDS,

&c. &c.

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## INTRODUCTION.

SINCE the first edition of "*Observations on Swords*" was published, in June 1844, a considerable change of opinion appears to have taken place; and it is now universally admitted, that if a sword is to be worn by an officer at all, it ought to be an efficient one, especially for India. I cannot quote a better authority than the late Major-General Sir Robert Sale, who told me, just before he left England, in December 1844, that "if an officer in India mean his men to fight, he must lead them on; and if he lead them on, he must fight in his own defence." The recent battles in the Punjab sufficiently attest the truth of this remark.

The attempt I have made to insure an efficient weapon has been attended with the most perfect success, and I have received the greatest encouragement to proceed; my pattern swords having been approved by the Commander-in-Chief, adopted at Head-Quarters, both for the Army and Navy, and recommended by the highest authorities in England and India\*. In publishing a Fifth Edition, I have endeavoured to render it useful to others as well as to myself, by adding such practical information respecting the

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\* Lord Hardinge says, "Wilkinson's Swords are far superior to any Oriental ones I have ever seen."

necessary outfit of a Cadet, or Officer about to join his regiment in the East, as might prevent useless expenditure, and at the same time omit nothing essential to comfort or convenience; for which information I am indebted to several Officers who have returned from India, and especially to Captain Greenwood, of H.M. 31st Regiment, who has kindly permitted me to make a copious extract from his interesting "*Narrative of the late victorious Campaign in Affghanistan,*" which I find corresponds with the opinions of all those who are best qualified to judge by their own experience. I have added a few remarks of my own to this extract, and shall be happy to give every information that can be required for the voyage, or for the overland route.

Having paid some slight attention to Oriental languages, and writing Persian myself, I may be able to point out such books as are absolutely requisite for the acquirement of Hindostanee and Persian, which languages are essential to every officer who enters the service of the Hon. East India Company, or who may be required by circumstances to remain even for a few years in India or Persia. The Persian language is by no means difficult in itself, and few books are required for a learner; but the constant introduction of Arabic words and sentences in almost all Persian writings, renders it impossible to read Persian books without some knowledge of Arabic: however, with one or two months' previous instruction, considerable progress may be made in the voyage out, by devoting only a few hours each

day, which, in fact, in a long sea voyage, may be rendered a source of present amusement and future emolument, Persian being generally understood by all the higher classes of Orientalists, as French is by most well-educated Europeans; although Hindoostanee is the first required\*.

It is universally acknowledged that the manufacture of swords was never at a lower ebb in this country than at the period when I commenced my present undertaking. Our officers returning from India can attest the numerous failures they have witnessed. Every civilized nation in the world, except England, attaches great importance to this branch of manufacture. In the East, enormous sums are given for swords, and they are handed down as heir-looms from one generation to another. In Persia, Turkey, and India, from 50*l.* to 100*l.* is no uncommon price for a blade only; but in England 5*l.* is often considered a high price for a sword, which may be superior to many of those so highly esteemed.

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\* *Extract of Military Despatch to the Government of India, dated 29th November, 1843*:—"No subaltern officer shall be hereafter appointed to the charge of a troop of Cavalry, or to a company of Native Infantry or Golundauze, until he shall have passed a prescribed Examination in the Hindoostanee Language, unless his appointment shall be rendered indispensable by the absence of a junior officer who is qualified for the duty; and any subaltern officer hereafter appointed to this charge, who may not have so passed, shall not be permitted to draw the command allowance assigned to it. No assistant surgeon, hereafter posted to the medical charge of Native troops shall receive the staff salary annexed to it unless he has passed the required Examination in Hindoostanee."

Russia, Austria, and France pay much greater attention to the subject; and although we can surpass them in all manufactures of steel, if we choose, *cheapness* in this country has been the principal recommendation to the seller; and the purchaser not knowing where to procure a trustworthy sword, or where to have it proved, becomes indifferent, and is content to order one with his regimentals, hat, or epaulettes, conceiving it to be completely a matter of chance; Green-grocers, Bakers, or Milliners may be just as likely to sell good swords by accident, as Tailors, Linen-drapers, or any other tradesmen wholly unacquainted and unconnected with the manufacture of metals, who have, of late years, become the principal vendors of swords to the officers of our Army and Navy, and, of course, know much less about the weapon they sell than their customers.

A young gentleman going to India is presented with a *regulation*-sword, purchased along with his shirts and stockings, and he only discovers, when opposed for the first time to some sturdy Affghan, that the hoop of an ale-cask would have been equally serviceable, being fortunate if he escape with a few severe wounds, as reminiscences of the mistake that has been committed. There is little inducement to manufacture a superior article when all parties vitally and pecuniarily interested, exhibit so much indifference, which must arise, in some measure, from the difficulty of discriminating between a good sword and a bad one. An officer's sword undergoes

no authorized proof whatever, and seldom, if ever, more than the manufacturer, with fatherly tenderness, chooses to inflict upon it. This state of things is giving place to a more correct notion of the importance of the subject, in consequence of the accounts received from those officers who have served in India. The swords of the private soldiers are all proved before they are received, either by the Ordnance or by the East India Company; and if it be necessary for the privates, surely it is for the officers. It cannot be either an act of bravery, prudence, or economy in an officer to trust his life to the chance of an untried and doubtful, in preference to an efficient and proved weapon; but such is actually the case. A very mistaken idea has prevailed that officers ought not to fight: certainly not, in St. James' Street; but if called into action they may be compelled to do so; and even in a riot, a good sword may save an officer's head from being broken, if acting only on the defensive.

The swords of privates are proved by striking each side flat on a table, and then back and edge on a block of wood; afterwards bending the blade each way until the curvature amounts to a shortening of four or five inches in the whole length, according to the pattern and substance. The operation of striking, being performed by a man, is liable to great uncertainty; no two men will strike with equal force, nor will the same man at different periods of the same day. This method is also open to favouritism, bribery, and error, in a variety of ways, and cannot be compared with the

unerring power of a machine. The manufacturers in the country, knowing the ignorance of those for whom they usually make *Officers' swords*, become as indifferent as the sellers and purchasers, and study only the cheapest methods of carrying on their business; so long as the *regulation* pattern is preserved, all parties are satisfied, and remain so until the hour of trial arrives. If it be worth while to wear a sword at all, surely it is worth while to know how to use it, and to feel that confidence which the knowledge of possessing a good weapon can alone inspire\*. The prevailing mania for CHEAP, I mean *low-priced* articles, is ruining the trade of this country: formerly, we were celebrated for the excellence of our steel manufactures, and the honesty of our commercial transactions; by this line of conduct we acquired pre-eminence and character, both of which we are losing faster than we gained them. Our goods were received abroad with perfect confidence, and transmitted from one merchant to another without examination; the invoice was sufficient. Now, every package requires to be verified for quality as well as quantity, if for a foreign market. There are still many highly honourable exceptions; but they suffer most by such transactions, as they cannot, and will not, attempt to compete in price with those who will send out worthless articles.

Our trade with America in cutting instruments is wonderfully reduced; *cast-iron* hatchets, saws, chisels,

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\* Mr. Angelo's School of Arms in St. James' Street is open every Tuesday and Saturday, from 3 to 6 o'clock.

and other edge-tools, have been manufactured by thousands, exported, and taken hundreds of miles into the interior of the country to clear a piece of land, and then broken at the first stroke. We compel foreigners to manufacture for themselves, when they would prefer being consumers; and then petition Parliament to remedy our grievances, and restore our loss of trade by legal enactments. The fault, however, does not rest wholly with the manufacturer. The merchant, or factor, who seeks only to make his own fortune, or one good adventure, regardless of the future, by going from one manufacturer to another, in order to purchase from those who sell at the lowest prices, is even more to blame than the manufacturer himself. How can it be expected that a poor half-starved artisan, ground down to a minimum of wages, barely sufficient to support life, should take any interest, or even be capable of producing good work? There must be a community of feeling between the employer and employed; no man will work well if inadequately paid for his labour. There is an overtrading in bad articles, and each manufacturer is encouraged to undersell his neighbour.

Repeated visits to our iron and steel manufacturing districts have convinced me, that unless some check can be put to such proceedings, our trade in cutlery and edge-tools will be entirely ruined; while other countries, taking advantage of our deplorable ignorance, and having solely to depend on the goodness and perfection of their manufactures to establish a character, will rise into importance, and we may then



arrive at the unenviable distinction of being *the principal manufacturers of rubbish to the whole world.*

It is much easier to detect faults than to suggest remedies ; but the obvious method to be adopted by all who desire to obtain good and cheap articles, is to purchase them not only at respectable houses, but from those who are likely, from the nature of their business, to have some knowledge of the articles in which they deal: for example, who would think of ordering his Bootmaker to supply him with a chronometer?—yet the absurdities I have pointed out are as great, and must strike every one on calm reflection.

After so long a digression, I return to my principal subject, **SWORDS**, the manufacture of which I have studied for twenty years, and have now entered into fully, in connection with my own business as a Gunmaker, and Army Contractor.

There are many essential properties in a sword besides the quality of the steel and the temper, which are either unknown to the makers generally, or wholly neglected, but which are most important to all who have occasion to use them ; namely,—the mounting, the balance, the combination of strength with lightness, and elasticity with firmness. Every swordsman knows that a thrust is almost always more efficient than a cut ; and a sword that is too elastic vibrates in the hand, and is more inconvenient to use than one that is firm. An old Officer of the 11th Dragoons told me that it was proverbial through all the Peninsular War, that our Dragoons, who were mostly brought into the Hospital with a slight punctured

wound in the chest or abdomen, almost invariably died. The French Dragoons on the contrary had mostly cut or incised wounds, and almost all recovered. An Army Surgeon, reading my observations, fully corroborated these facts, and said that in eleven years' experience in India he had constantly seen the most trifling punctured wounds terminate fatally, and the most awful cuts cured. *The centre of percussion*, or that part of a sword in which its whole force is concentrated, and on which there is no vibration, ought to be distinctly marked, so that every one using it may at once know on what part the hardest blow can be struck, without regarding, or entering into the philosophy of the subject. To all these points I have especially directed my attention, and I have endeavoured to redeem this branch of our manufactures. In order to effect this object, and to give a more severe proof than has ever been attempted, I have invented a sword Epreuve, which represents a power similar to, but far exceeding any human force. It is easily adjustable to every kind of sword, and having ascertained, by means of a dynamometer, the maximum of human force in striking with a sword, I subject every sword manufactured under my direction, to the unerring and unfavourable power of my machine, which may be likened to the arm of a giant, with power sufficient to decapitate at a single stroke; to which is added the bending proof, and the Toledo proof of thrusting against solid iron, and through an iron plate thicker than a cuirass: after which proof, it is not likely these swords will ever

break in any actual encounter. I propose, also, to prove the swords of any officer or civilian, who may desire to ascertain the capabilities of his own blade, and at the same time to afford an opportunity of ascertaining the individual strength of each person when making a cut, in order to compare it with the proof to which I will afterwards subject the blade.

I must, however, caution gentlemen not to break their swords purposely, by supposing them incapable of being broken: there is a limit to all things, and a sword that is sufficiently stout to give an efficient thrust, must not be expected to fold three times round a turban, or even to bear bending the point round to touch the hilt, which I have known attempted, in consequence of the character my swords have obtained.

It would not be difficult to make such swords, but they would be very inferior for all practical purposes, as they must be very thin. Every one knows that a clock spring is coiled up in a spiral of many convolutions, and will return to its original form if drawn out to a straight line, but a sword is not required to do so; and if it did, would be an useless weapon.

It should be remembered that a sword is, perhaps, the only cutting instrument that is required to perform impossibilities. We do not shave with a hatchet, fell trees with a razor, or cut iron with a pen-knife. Every tool has, or ought to have the temper, and the angle of its edge, suited to the work it has to perform, besides the advantage generally of falling into the hands of a good workman acquainted

with its capabilities; which is not always the case with a sword, which is required to be hard, yet elastic; strong, yet light: it must cut and thrust at steel, iron, wood, leather, flesh, hair, and every other substance, without bending or breaking. Now, each of these properties requires a different angle of edge and temper, and cannot be combined in their greatest perfection in one and the same instrument; consequently we are compelled to content ourselves by combining the whole in the best manner possible under the peculiarities of the circumstances.

A word or two on Dress and Presentation Swords may suffice. An useless and inefficient blade stuck into an inelegant mass of silver gilt, is often presented to a distinguished officer as a mark of esteem or approbation, which, if ever worn, is only an incumbrance, and totally inapplicable to the purposes for which it is intended—either dress or service.

In my opinion a Presentation Sword, whatever may be the price, should be both serviceable and elegant; the blade of the finest quality possible, and ornamented with original and suitable designs. The mountings and scabbard should be light and beautiful: let gold and precious stones supply the place of silver, if the sum devoted to the purpose will admit; and if not, let the mountings be of such a description as may be worn by an officer at Court, or at parties, without personal inconvenience; and if called suddenly into action (as just previous to the Battle of Waterloo), he may find he has a trusty weapon at his side, and not an ornament for a side-board.

The very great patronage I have already received will stimulate me to persevere in an attempt to render the swords of this country equal, if not superior, to any in the world, and in this edition (1850) I can confidently assert that they are so.

The Machines are now in daily use, and no officer need wear an unproved weapon.

All who are desirous of more extensive information on Guns, Swords, &c., I beg to refer to my work published by Messrs. Longman and Co., entitled "ENGINES OF WAR; or Historical and Experimental Observations on Ancient and Modern Warlike Machines and Implements, including the Manufacture of Guns, Gunpowder, and Swords, with Remarks on Bronze, Iron, Steel, &c."

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REMARKS ON THE OUTFIT OF A CADET,  
OR  
OFFICER GOING TO JOIN HIS REGIMENT  
IN INDIA.

*Extract from Captain Greenwood's "NARRATIVE," before  
referred to.*

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"I SHOULD recommend young men who may be gazetted to regiments in India, not to join the depôt, but to obtain leave from the authorities at the Horse Guards at once to join their regiments. This I believe is always granted on application, as well as the Government allowance of £95 passage money, paid to the shipmaster with whom they may make

a bargain for a cabin\*. For this sum a passage may always be obtained with a separate cabin. The masters of ships ask more, but none of them will refuse it, if they find they cannot persuade you into increasing the amount. Chatham is decidedly anything but a good school for young men. The officers are mostly strangers to each other—here to-day, gone to-morrow; and belonging as they do to so many different regiments, will not be bothered with offering advice to young men, which probably would not be taken, when they are not attached to their own particular corps. This is different when the regiment is joined. There is a species of freemasonry among the members of every corps, which will insure to the young recruit the advice of experienced heads, whenever he is disposed to seek it, and very often without his doing so, if his seniors take an interest in him, which they assuredly will do in every gentlemanly and well-disposed young man.

“There is a subject connected with his voyage to India, to which I would direct the particular attention of the young recruit. I mean the selection of his outfit. The persons who make their livelihood by providing these things, invariably persuade their victim that he will require hosts of articles which he hardly ever heard of before, or knows the use of, independently of giving him at least three times the

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\* “A comfortable cabin may now be had in any first-class ship for 110*l.*, and a half cabin for 85*l.*”—CAPTAIN J. BARBER’S “Overland Guide-Book,” p. 43.

proper quantity of those which are really necessary; and what with soldering up in tin all those things which he is to find so indispensable, and various other expedients which they will use to swell out their bills, they generally make the outfit amount to pretty nearly the price of the first commission, and in some instances I have known it exceeded\*. I will now give you a list of what is necessary for the comfort and respectability of a young officer proceeding to join his regiment in India†.

“ One Regimental Coatee.

“ One Pair Epaulettes. (W.)

“ One Blue Frock Coat.

“ One Pair Shoulder Straps. (W.)

“ Two Shell Jackets of Cashmerette or other light material.

“ One Cloth Ditto.

“ Materials for another of Cloth, not made up.

“ Four Pair Cloth Regulation Trousers‡.

“ One Sword. (W.)

“ Two Sashes. (W.)

“ One Buff Belt with Breastplate. (W.)

“ Two Forage Caps. (W.)

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\* This observation is perfectly just; but the author of this pamphlet can refer officers to some few respectable houses who never recommend more than is absolutely necessary.

† A cadet will not of course require as much as an officer going to join his regiment.

‡ Two pairs are mostly sufficient, as the White Ant destroys them before four pairs can be worn out.

“ One Chaco. (W.)

“ Two Sword Knots. (W.)

“ One Pair of Pistols. (W.)

“ I have not mentioned linen, people having different ideas respecting the quantity which will be necessary for four or five months' wear. Perhaps six dozen shirts, the same number of socks, and four dozen of towels, will be enough. A few can always be washed on board, if your man collects water in buckets whenever it rains, which it frequently does about the Line, most heavily. The full dress coat is seldom worn in India, not more, on an average, than four or five times a year. One, therefore, is quite sufficient. Not so in England, where the officers dine in their full-dress coats every day, wear them at many parades, and mount guard in them. Under these circumstances, it is of course necessary to have two, one for all-work, and another to wear on state occasions, when young ladies are to be captivated at balls, dinner parties, &c. Nor is the blue frock much worn; in some regiments officers never appear at parades in them. The shell jacket is worn at all parades, and duties of every kind, and as red cloth is very expensive in India, and difficult to be obtained, I recommend four to be taken out, three made up, and materials for another. At mess, officers generally wear white jackets. These should not be purchased in England; they are to be obtained quite as well in India at a

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\* All articles marked (W.) are supplied by Wilkinson and Son, of the best quality, or cheaper if required, and references given to respectable houses for every article not supplied by themselves.



quarter the price, and there is generally a regimental pattern which must be strictly adhered to. White trousers should also be obtained in India; the cost of them there, made of American drill, which is the material always worn, is about six or seven shillings a pair\*. Those furnished by English tailors will not stand three washings, which indeed is the case with all articles made of linen cloth. The Natives wash clothes very differently to the method adopted in England. The dhobies, or washermen, have a large board, purposely made rough on one side; this they take down to the river, and after wetting the clothes, beat them upon it. Indeed they often beat them between two stones. Cotton cloth stands this proceeding pretty well, but linen is destroyed at once. I would not recommend portable chests of drawers to be taken out. They may be purchased in Calcutta for £3, equal to those which cost £10 at home. The bullock trunks also are made too large in England. No Indian bullock could carry them when full. I have seen some on so large a scale, that I am sure it would be beyond the power of the wretched beast commonly procurable to carry even the empty boxes. A very good pair can be bought in India, with straps complete, for about £1 10s. I suppose a London trunk-maker would charge £5 for inferior trunks†.

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\* For the voyage 1 dozen pairs of common canvas trousers are best, and can be easily washed by the sailors.

† As clothes must be taken out in some kind of trunk, those called bullock trunks are best, which, for the Overland route, should be 2 feet 3 inches long, and 14 inches wide by 14 inches deep.

Neither should expensive writing-desks or dressing-cases be taken out, they invariably go to pieces during the hot winds. The best description of writing-desk is a portable one of Russia leather. A canteen or portable iron bedstead should never be taken out: they are totally useless, and from their weight, a great incumbrance and expense; yet the outfitters will assure the young officer that they are absolutely indispensable, and that he could not possibly do without them. The consequence is, that nearly every ensign that joins takes out one of each, and after probably paying about as much as they originally cost for carrying them hundreds of miles about the country, finds he never can make any use of them, that nobody would take them even as a gift, and that the cheapest plan for him to have adopted at first, would have been to have thrown them overboard during his passage out.

“A pair of pistols may be considered a most necessary part of an officer’s outfit. They should not be too long and heavy: barrels about six inches in length, and twenty to twenty-four bore, I should recommend as the best size. They should also be furnished with spring hooks at the side to fit on a belt, and the triggers should be made to pull exceedingly light, or they never can be used with accuracy. A general fault with pistols is their being made so excessively stiff in this respect, that it is impossible to keep the sight on the object when firing. They ought to be purchased of some eminent gun-maker, on whose respectability dependence

may be placed. Nothing of this kind should ever be selected from the stock of Birmingham rubbish with which outfitters are in the habit of tempting young and inexperienced persons going out. They are generally got up in a very showy manner, in smart cases, often with German silver furniture, in order to catch the eye. Avoid them: they are often unsafe, and never to be depended on. If the outfitters can make them go off their hands, they do not care if they ever go off afterwards; and certainly in many cases it would be desirable if they did not, they being more likely to injure the persons firing them, than any body else\*.”

To these remarks of Captain Greenwood, I may add, that a good Portable Telescope, such as I have manufactured expressly for deer-stalking, is an extremely useful companion for reconnoitring or amusement; as well as a large clasp deer-stalking knife, with a fork, the knife being applicable to as many purposes as the dagger of Hudibras. Also, a pocket Magnetic Needle, either separate or combined with the Telescope.

If to the foregoing articles of necessity, I add as luxuries almost essential to the comfort of every officer in India who is a sportsman, a double gun, with case and apparatus complete, or a double rifle, or both, according to circumstances, I shall be suspected of interested motives, but I refer to any one

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\* Wilkinson and Son always keep Pistols ready, with cases complete, especially suited to officers and cadets.

who has been in India, to confirm or deny this statement; and the extra expense can be more than compensated by avoiding the worse than useless articles which are often taken. The best of every thing is always the cheapest, but the highest price may not suit every purchaser; therefore I have provided good and serviceable double guns, rifles, and pistols, with cases complete, at less than half the price of the best, which are perfectly safe and warranted.

Subjoined is a list of all those articles manufactured and provided by our establishment, which may be relied on for correctness, whenever attention to regulation pattern is indispensable; and for all such goods as we are not in the habit of supplying ourselves (unless particularly requested), we can refer to highly respectable houses, who, like ourselves, are not accustomed to offer, or recommend, any thing that is useless or unsuitable.

It may happen that parties residing in the country, or not having sufficient time, or ladies fitting out their sons, may wish some person to undertake the whole, and save them both trouble and expense; in which case, we willingly take upon ourselves all the arrangements requisite, including the overland transit, or voyage by sea.

*Orders for whole Regiments, executed with great dispatch,  
and on the lowest terms possible.*

# EVERY THING FOR THE SPORTSMAN, OFFICER, AND CADET.

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Best and Plain Double and Single Guns.

Double and Single Rifles.

Ditto ditto Pistols.

Self-acting revolving six-barrel Ditto.

Air Guns and Air Canes complete.

Every approved variety of Fire-Arms in general use, and repairs of every kind to Guns of all makers.

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## CASES.

Mahogany and Oak Gun and Pistol Cases.

Brown and Black Leather Cases and Covers for Guns at full length, or taken to pieces.

Canvas, Macintosh, and List Covers.

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Silver, copper, tin, horn, and leather Gun and Pistol Powder Flaaks, of all sizes.

Shot Pouches and Straps, Shot Belts, Steel Chargers.

Cleaning and Loading Rods.

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**ALL MILITARY ACCOUTREMENTS FOR CADETS AND OFFICERS JOINING THEIR REGIMENTS IN INDIA, STRICTLY CORRECT TO REGIMENTAL PATTERNS.**

**WARRANTED PROVED, their New Regulation Swords; Naval, Military, and Dress Swords, Cimeters, Claymores, and Highland Dirks.**

Elegant gold and silver mounted Presentation Swords, from 50 to 500 guineas; Embroidered Belts and Sabretaches; Black and Buff Sword Belts and Plates; Dress and Plain Sword Knots; Gold Epaulettes and Shoulder Straps with improved Fasteners; Silk Sashes, Chacos and Ornaments; Forage Caps, and every Military Outfit, *avoiding all useless articles*. Also, a new and improved Sword Belt.

Oriental Blades mounted in any style, and inscriptions in Sanscrit, Arabic, Turkish, or Persian.

#### MATERIALS.

Gunpowder, Shot, Copper Caps of all sizes, Elastic Concave Wadding, and Wadding of all kinds and sizes, Copper Tubes, Wadding in Sheets, Patent Cartridges, Flints.

#### SUNDRIES.

Copper and Tin Gunpowder Barrels and Magazines, Powder Dryers, Shot Scoops, Game Bags, Rabbit Netting, Eprouvettes for proving Gunpowder, Holsters, Cartouch Boxes, Dram Bottles, Gun Slings, Rifle Belts, Swivels.

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Percussion Hand Grenades for the defence of houses, &c.

## YACHTS.

Cannon, Rifles, Muskets, Bayonets, Pistols, Cutlasses, Boarding Pikes, Tomahawks, Cartouch-boxes, Cartridges, Belts, Cannon Tubes, Powder, Balls, and every kind of apparatus and material required.

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