

CORRESPONDENCE.

THE NEW MILITIA ACT AND THE QUESTIONS OF DISCIPLINE UNDER IT.

To the Editor of "THE VOLUNTEER REVIEW."

SIR:—There appeared in your issue of the 9th instant, an ably written letter over the signature "Militiaman," laudatory of the new Militia Act, but animadverting on the power to make *Regulations* conferred on the Commander-in-Chief by the 96th clause, and especially on the heading of the new Enlistment Rolls.

I am not so much concerned to controvert your correspondent's objections to this option, as to take exception to a principle which he evolves elsewhere. But I doubt if the authorities have really exceeded the powers entrusted to them in thus apparently ignoring what your correspondent assumes to be the option of the six months' notice. The 8th clause appears to me to be of an entirely negative nature. It debars a Volunteer from quitting his company *without* the six months' notice, but it concedes no right of demanding a discharge on giving that notice.

The privilege created by the clause is one of *possibility*, not of *right* and the permission to use it is evidently intended to be contingent on particular circumstance, such as those of a man quitting the Dominion, or his Battalion District, under the necessity of providing for his subsistence.

Every Volunteer knows that such reasonable claims are not, and cannot be, ever ignored. But every Volunteer Officer knows that the *right* to demand a discharge at six months' simply constitutes the service a *six months' Force*. I confess that before my attention was drawn to the more careful consideration of the Act, I was under the impression that it perpetuated the error of its predecessor in this respect, and rejoice to perceive that my apprehensions had less foundation than I imagined.

Indeed I am disposed to admit, with your correspondent, that the Act is, on the whole one fairly adapted to the present interests of the country; but he is very much mistaken if he imagines that it is generally looked upon with the favor with which he regards it.

It is not my present purpose to point out what I consider to be its great defects. I fear it is possible that they might be points which would commend themselves to your correspondent. In one particular at least I am unfortunate enough to hold an opposite opinion; for I conceive a large discretionary power to make *Regulations* to be one of the very best features of a measure which from its loose construction, is susceptible of—indeed requires—much interpretation and amendment, which last I believe it will receive during the next Session of Parliament.

Practically the heading of the enrolment lists appears to work no such damage to the

Force as "Militiaman" apprehends. So far as my experience of re-enrollment goes, the terms of the obnoxious heading have been unanimously accepted, by the men present at the musters of companies specially ordained for explanation of the terms of the Act, and this unanimity, or something very nearly approaching it, seems by published accounts from localities beyond my personal experience, to be general. This leads me to a consideration of that axiom of your correspondent the justice of which I chiefly feel it to be an absolute duty to the Force to bring in question.

I think then, that when "Militiaman" asserts that "The Canadian Soldier will submit to just so much military discipline and no more, as will enable him to act with his neighbors in defence of their common rights and individual property," he does injustice to the law-abiding spirit of his countrymen, and narrows down to a captious, suspicious and unwilling acquiescence in an implied burdensome duty the free liberality of sentiment with which the Volunteer really, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, enters upon his self imposed duty.

Were I to carry out the proposition to its legitimate consequence, I should scarcely avoid the conclusion that the amount of discipline to which each individual would choose to submit would be exactly that which would appear right in his own eyes, as almost every man erects in his own mind his own standard of the necessities of the case and the result would be a chaos of self opinion and insubordination.

The average Canadian has however too much knowledge and sound sense not to be aware that, to produce effective combination, every man must be content to surrender a reasonable portion of his own will—to place in abeyance part of his own idiosyncrasy—for the general good. And, in effect, he does so whenever his military duties require the sacrifice, to a remarkable extent.

It is true that occasionally a narrow idea incident to a want of enlarged experience will manifest itself. For instance, I have known members of a country company, under the crude idea that they were amenable only to the authority of their own officers, demur to the correction of some slight irregularity by other officers of the Battalion but this little village feeling (so to speak) is easily dissipated by an explanation of the relations which each man in a regiment bears to the whole.

In fact the Canadian Volunteer, I am proud to believe, would care little to belong to a body deficient in proper strictness, and consequently open to the imputation of being below the average of smartness and efficiency, and we are sure that no officer would care to belong to one whose members were not amenable to the discipline requisite to maintain it at that average.

But even were it otherwise—were that

habit of self abnegation in the cause of duty which goes so far to make a nation invincible—wanting—it is now acknowledged on all hands to be a duty imperative on every man in the Dominion to bear his share in putting his country in such a defensive position. It will render her very formidable to attack, and although much consideration is due to the man who voluntarily lightens the general burden of service which would otherwise bear equally on all, the duty once undertaken could never be allowed to be performed according to individual taste or caprice.

I am no advocate of a harsh discipline, I have no desire to see such relations as exist between Regulars and their Officers obtained among Volunteers, or to see Volunteers hampered with half the restriction to which Regulars are subject, even were these things possible; but I maintain that to fulfil with efficiency the conditions of even a very mild military service, and the requirements of the country, something more is requisite than submission to just so much military discipline, and no more, as will enable a man to act with his neighbors in defence of their common rights.

A little consideration will suffice to show that it is next to impossible that every man should have the liberty of a choice of leaders. Suppose his captain happen to be the man of his choice, what is to happen if his colonel, who, if the volunteer belong to a country company, is probably a man of whom he knows little, does not meet his approbation? Such a state of things would be contrary to the whole spirit of military organization.

Equally untenable is the principle that a volunteer should be at liberty to leave his corps whenever he may be dissatisfied. Practically no captain cares to keep a dissatisfied man, but to accord the right to leave whenever discontented would be to open the door to the gratification of every passing caprice.

And what is the amount of service to guard against the contingencies of which it is necessary to erect so strong a Bill of Rights? Sixteen days drill in the year, which although in some cases, ordered at an inconvenient season last year, is unlikely to be so again. Besides this there are probably some eight or ten meetings (apart from target) at other periods during the year. On all these occasions the convenience of the Volunteers (as is only right) consulted, to the utmost possible extent. And these onerous duties need last no longer than three years.

In fine the working of the Force, so far as my experience or information goes, is of so cheerful and kindly a nature that we feel a little surprise that it should have occurred to any one of the evident knowledge and ability of your correspondent, to raise points of a nature calculated to excite dissatisfaction, on the false basis of an erroneous estimate of the rights conceded and the obligations imposed by the Act. There is,