

THE CANADIAN MILITIA GAZETTE

A Weekly Journal devoted to the Interests of the Active Force of the Dominion.

Fifth Year.
VOL. IV, No. 49.

OTTAWA, THURSDAY, 5 DECEMBER, 1889.

\$1.50 per annum in advance.
Single Copies Five Cents.

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No. 18, of 29th November, 1889.

Topics of the Week.

A couple of weeks ago, we stated in these columns our conviction that political influence is bound for all time to determine appointments to commissions in the permanent force (in common with other branches of the public service). This statement is the subject of an interesting letter appearing in our Correspondence columns this issue. The writer is shocked because it looks as if we "considered this a normal condition of affairs," and notes that in England the appointment of an unqualified man to an army commission would almost suffice to turn out a ministry. Now, we published a statement of supposed fact, not an endorsement of the same; and while on principle we would like to see such appointments made without any regard to political influence, we hold that its predominance need not necessarily be productive of serious evil. This condition of affairs cannot properly be said to exist because "the Canadian public appear more or less apathetic," for it is to the Canadian public that the blame very largely attaches. When an appointment is to be made, the friends of every eligible young man besiege the local politicians and parliamentary representatives for their influence to secure the appointment for this particular favourite, and the politicians appear in swarms in the Militia Department to execute their commissions. The minister who would be quite proof against this pressure has not yet made his appearance. On the list of applicants there are probably many in every way fitted for the position, and also as many quite unfitted. Occasionally a gentleman of the latter class may slip in, but we could name several officers who admittedly would be a credit to the military service of any country, whom political influence has placed in ours.

The Minister who, for whatever cause, gives an appointment to a person unfitted for it, sows the seed of a good deal of future trouble for himself or his successors in office. In time, it will come to the appointee's turn for promotion, and then what is to be done? It will not do to make a public confession of his unfitness, and so he gets his first step up. His turn comes again, and again, and the higher he gets the more obvious his weak points appear. A crisis will be reached at last, when it is impossible to further jeopardise the efficiency of the service, and the political favourite has to be passed over. Then what unpleasantness results! A safe rule to be followed would be to appoint to the lowest commission in the force, no man who could not be confidently expected to become by age and experience well qualified for the highest.

Our correspondent speaks of the present condition of affairs as "an abnormal one that can only last at most a few decades until the permanent force is fairly started." We opine that if the force is indeed to be permanent, or to last even a few decades, there will have to be a radical change in its surroundings. This must be worked out mainly by its own officers as the result of their experience, for which the people of Canada have ungrudgingly paid in the hope that it may be productive of results beyond those so far achieved. The main advantage of the permanent force consists of the schools based upon it. These have so far failed to reduce to the expected minimum the number of unqualified officers in the Canadian militia, and it would be well if the cause of this failure were ascertained and an attempt made at remedy.

An interesting article in the *New York Times* on the rates of officers pay in the British army, concludes as follows: "It must stand to the credit side of a soldier's career that if he is forced to many expenses he also gets a pleasant and even luxurious daily life more cheaply and easily than it can be got in any other profession. He travels, he entertains, he goes on horseback, he has a good house and servants, all in the natural course of existence; and these are, after all, the signs by which men estimate worldly success."

The United States Army.

The regular army cost the United States for the fiscal year 1888-89, upwards of thirty million dollars, as shown by the report of the Secretary of War, just issued. In this he notes that the ratio of one man out of every 1,105, or one-eleventh of one per cent., which the army bore to the population in 1870, is now reduced to one in every 2,569, or one twenty-fifth of one per cent. The Secretary advises the adoption of the three battalion organization, which, he says, all other powers have adopted, except Persia and China. "The necessity for this formation in the infantry is even greater than in the cavalry and artillery, where it has long been the rule. The reason for the change, always strong, has now, in view of the greater deployment necessary because of the improvements in small-arms, become imperative."

Attention is called to Gen. Schofield's views as to lineal promotion through lower grades without recommendation. Gen. Sherman's adverse opinion is also referred to. A system of examination for promotion is, however, proposed, which will, in the opinion of the Secretary, remove a principal objection to the system Gen. Schofield proposes: "A system of non-competitive examinations with well-defined limitations is founded on good sense and supported by our own experience, as well as that of those countries where the efficiency of a standing army is held in the highest possible estimation. I would call especial attention to the remarks of my predecessor upon this subject in his report for 1888. The examination should be so broad in its application as to require the officer to show affirmatively that he is qualified for the promotion he seeks. It should not, of course, be a mere book examination, but should give full credit to an officer's record for practical efficiency and usefulness in the service, thus avoiding danger of injustice to those who may have come in from the volunteers or from the ranks."