

The Canadian Military Review,

JANUARY 1st. 1881.

Correspondence.

To the Editor of the CANADIAN MILITARY REVIEW.

DEAR SIR,—Thanking you for your kind indulgence for space in your columns, I wish to point out some weaknesses in our militia system, and where changes would do good.

Owing to Government mal-administration, to the pernicious influence of party politics, and above all to the apathy of and want of sympathy on the part of the public, volunteering has become unpopular, the best men do not join the ranks, and officers are retiring disgusted and disappointed. Now, as far as this city is concerned, I would advocate the amalgamation of all the different corps (excepting the Cavalry and Field Battery) into two strong battalions, each to comprise ten companies of fifty-five men. The same remedy might with advantage be applied also to all the force where practicable. We would then have fewer exhibitions of skeleton drill. Again the internal dissensions in some of the corps point to a remedy as above suggested.

I would advocate the appointment by Government of one paid officer and one paid non-commissioned officer to each corps, the former to act as drill instructor, quartermaster, and musketry instructor, and the latter as orderly room clerk and quartermaster-sergeant. The appointment of these paid regimental officers should be, as far as possible, from graduates of the Kingston Military College. The additional expense could be met by reducing the present staff of Deputy Adjutant-Generals and Brigade-Majors, one officer to each Military District to be considered sufficient. In the event of active service, the senior regimental officer to take command, and calling to his staff such other officers who were acquainted with the topography of the part of the country about to be the theatre of operations and who were otherwise efficient. Maps and other information to be obtained from the Brigade Office of the district.

GOVERNMENT PAY AND REGIMENTAL EXPENSES.

The individual members of the militia should not receive pay. A certain sum (sufficient to defray all expenses without the necessity of the commissioned officers being constantly called upon to put their hands in their pockets) should be paid by the Government to each corps at the rate of so much per man inspected and passed. A better class of men would then be induced to join the ranks.

INTERIOR ECONOMY.

Thousands of dollars have been thrown away in the course of years by most corps (it is especially the case in this city) from want of a proper system. As a general rule the quartermaster's department is inefficiently managed, and the quartermaster-sergeant appointed for other reasons than his efficiency as such. Clothing and accoutrements have had to be bought from the Government stores and elsewhere to make up for these articles lost, and the spectacle is often furnished (in this city at least) of officers and non-commissioned officers scouring the old clothes shops, previous to an inspection, to supply deficiencies. Knapsacks, haversacks, waterbottles, canteens and the other paraphernalia of camp life are generally stowed away where "moth and rust do corrupt." The neglect of Governments and Corporations to provide suitable armories is partly responsible for this.

DRILL.

The great improvement in rifled guns has rendered the old stiff formations and great precision of movement (formerly con-

sidered so desirable) to a great extent obsolete. The great requisites of the present day are "prompt obedience to orders," "rapidity of movement," and above all a practical knowledge of the rifle and how to use it effectively. Consequently the greater part of the time at present occupied in drilling in a comparatively small hall is thrown away. It is very seldom that skirmishing and extended order drill is practiced in the open, and judging distance drill for rifle practice is entirely neglected, the militia when firing at the targets always doing so from known distances. Within the past two years an improvement in this respect has taken place in the shape of skirmishing matches, but even then, competitors have an easy task with a firing point in front and another behind. This brings us down to

RIFLE SHOOTING PRACTICE.

This is most deplorably neglected. In the first place Government provides twenty rounds per annum, with which the unfortunate militiaman is supposed to perfect himself in rifle shooting, and to make matters worse these twenty rounds are generally of inferior quality (this past season notoriously so). There is no provision made for marking, the expense generally bearing on the officers of the corps practicing.

In addition to above difficulties, when a mechanic has to sacrifice a half day's pay in order to get to the "butts," it is not surprising that so few of the force know anything of the use of the rifle, and I maintain that however well drilled a man may be otherwise, without a practical knowledge of his weapons he is useless.

Very few officers commanding companies take any interest in this important branch of training, beyond complying with the militia regulations, and even that is not conscientiously done. Government gives a large amount of money annually in sending a team of marksmen to compete at Wimbledon, and grants to the Dominion Rifle Association, and to the several Provincial and regimental associations. This money is annually competed for by pretty much the same men, and goes largely into the pockets of a few (if we may use the term "pot hunters" or professional shots, men who are not otherwise distinguished for their enthusiasm in the Volunteer cause). These grants of money to rifle associations should be largely reduced and the regimental allowance of ammunition increased to at least 100 rounds per man to be fired under the personal superintendance of the musketry instructor, assisted by the officers and sergeants of the company. The pay of each man not completing his 100 rounds to be withheld from the corps. In England every non-efficient volunteer is fined the amount of his pay.

UNIFORM.

The Canadian Militia officers still uniform their soldiers as to effect neatness and precision rather than usefulness, and while hundreds of dollars are annually thrown away by themselves on fancy head-dresses and other ornaments (if Government not furnishing these things) the force is unprovided with uniform suitable for a winter campaign, most corps not even having fur caps. A sorry spectacle would these same corps present if suddenly called upon for active service any time between November and March.

When may we hope to see a Canadian corps in light war clothing, adapted to our winters, say blanket coat, beef moccasins, fur caps and woolen mits, and each man provided with snow-shoes and taught to use them.

Much more might be written in favor of reform, but we of time prevents at present.

Hoping I have not transgressed the bounds of your indulgence as to space,

I am, Sir,

Yours truly,

REFORM