

Are Medical Officers of the Militia Ready for Active Service?

THE recent tension of relations with the United States, produced by the unreasonable and illogical message of President Cleveland, suggests food for thought on the condition of the medical service of the militia. It is apparent at the outset that we have no medical service properly so called. It is true we have a number of medical men attached to battalions and corps who are supposed to be military surgeons. Without wishing to disparage in any way the professional acquirements of any of these worthy and patriotic gentlemen, it may fairly be asked how many of them could pass an examination in Porter's "Surgeon's Hand-book"? How many of them know anything of ambulance drill? How many of them are there who could direct a field hospital or medical transport column? In making these remarks we are not referring to any want of desire on their part to fulfil these functions, but the authorities ask for no other qualification for surgeons in the militia than that of being legally licensed practitioners. Yet in fact the medical service of armies has become one of the most specialized of specialties. Has not the time arrived when medical officers should pass a qualifying examination both for entrance and promotion? All medical officers in the English volunteers must now do so, and in consequence are considered and designated very properly as "efficient," and thereby gain for their corps an increased capitation grant. Is it not time that we woke up in this country to the fact that twice within three years there has been real danger of war, and that if such a catastrophe should arrive how utterly unprepared we would be.

In 1885 Surgeon-General Bergin submitted a complete scheme of medical organization to the Government. Since then the attention of the Government has been drawn to the subject. Individual writers have not been wanting to do their share in agitating for medical reorganization. What has been accomplished? Next to nothing. The authorities should take the present opportunity to purchase equipment for at least two Beaver companies. Public opinion is favorable to the increase of expenditure upon military account, and the men are ready to fill the ranks.