

CORRESPONDENCE.

VOLUNTEERS AND THE NEW MILITIA BILL.

To the Editor of "THE VOLUNTEER REVIEW."

SIR,—The new Militia Bill, the long expected and much desired, the object of so much anxious speculation to Volunteers and others, has at length been printed and published, and everyone who feels an interest in the subject, may form for himself an unbiassed opinion as to its merits or its defects. It would be idle to deny that many who have devoted some careful thought to the subject of the defence of the Dominion, find little in the Bill at present under discussion, to cause them satisfaction, and I at least, must number myself among those who have derived little pleasure from its perusal. I do not speak as a Volunteer, smarting under what some very worthy members of that force, consider scant courtesy and consideration, though I am an officer of the active force of some years standing. I have never considered that the Bill should be framed to meet the views of any particular body however numerous and influential. And would have been well content to have seen the whole Volunteer force swept away by a stroke of the pen, provided some more efficient organization was substituted in its stead. Now, I am not prepared to say, that the new Bill is not to a certain extent, an improvement on the present system, but it is an improvement in degree rather than in kind, and falls woefully short of what the Dominion might reasonably have looked for.

As far as the Volunteers are concerned, they may be dismissed in a few words. Whether such a force is or is not desirable, it is patent that the framers of the Act could have had no real desire to witness its continuance for the Bill sets out with enacting that if a party chooses to cast his lot in with Volunteers, his term of service shall extend over three years. Whereas, if he will only slightly control his ardor and allow himself to be drafted, he may gracefully retire at the end of two years. A witty Frenchman on hearing of the death of the unfortunate Admiral Byng, remarked that the English Government had ordered him to be shot *pour encourager les autres*. And it really appears as if such wrong kind of encouragement, which the framers of the clauses containing the above enactments wished to hold out to those among our young men who might feel inclined to join some Volunteer organization. We all know that to keep a Volunteer corps up to its full strength, is not always the easiest of tasks, but on the contrary, is one requiring the constant care and attention of the officers, unless perhaps in a few peculiarly favored localities, but it appears by a provision of the new Bill that in the event of failure of any corps to maintain the compliment for each respectively, Her Majesty may disband any such corps. And may also disband any corps of Volun-

teer Militia if considered necessary to do so. When it is borne in mind that Volunteer Battalions must not draft a single man, (Sec. 6.—The Volunteer Militia shall be composed of corps raised wholly by voluntary enlistment.) And that any Volunteer may retire from the corps to which he is attached, by simply giving, to his Commanding officer six months notice of his intention to that effect—it will readily be conceded that the Minister of Militia, if to him really belongs all the merit of this Bill, is not very enthusiastic on the subject of Volunteering. I have no fault to find with him on that account, it would perhaps be as well that the system of Volunteering should be abolished—this is a view of the case on which people of course will agree to differ, but I do maintain that by the new Bill the Volunteers are made to occupy an anomalous position, and one which must be a source of anything but satisfaction to those who have sacrificed time, money, convenience and sometimes temper in their effort to be of use in the only force that for some years back these Provinces could boast.

The present Volunteer system is one open to very grave objections, in fact I may say, teeming with defects, as most Volunteer officers very well know. But was it not to remedy the faults of this very system that a new Bill was required—a Bill that would do so was promised us, at least we were led to expect it,—but how has the promise been fulfilled? As far as I can see the only probable difference in the result of the action of the two systems,—is that the present one gives us some thirty thousand very inefficient soldiers, and the proposed one will give us forty thousand of the same character. The system of discipline applied to the Volunteer force, has now been tried some five or six years, and has been found sadly wanting. No one who knows anything about the matter will deny that such is the case.

How many battalions are there in the Dominion, of which it can be truly asserted that they are in a much more efficient state, as regards drill and discipline, now, several years after their formation than they were at the end of the first twelve months of their Battalion existence. A system of discipline so barren of good results must be a vicious one. And yet is it not the very same system which it is proposed to apply to the new force!

Those who at a moment's warning, marched to the frontier on the 3rd June, 1866, must have felt sensibly, how admirably the system under which they had been trained was calculated to inspire mutual confidence in the breasts of officers and men, if by chance without a day's preparation they had been obliged to go under fire with all their military imperfections on their heads. That they had not to do so, we all know was owing quite as much to luck as good management. And I much fear that any sudden emergency will find a force trained under

the provisions of the new Bill, pretty much in the position of the Volunteers of June, 1866. I may, however, here remark, *en passant*, that I will ever look back with great satisfaction to that memorable month, for I am confident that the Battalion, to which I have the honor to belong, learnt more of their duty as soldiers in the short fortnight they were on the frontier than during the balance of the five years which have elapsed since their enrollment. And yet they have had during all that time the full benefit of that system of discipline which in its main features is intended to be applied to the new force. It is of little consequence what a force may be called, for which a nation must depend for its safety and existence—Regulars, Volunteers or Militia, one name may do as well as another. But if the nation really is depending on it, it is of the greatest consequence that that force when required, should be able to render efficient service. I take it, that sixteen company drills of three hours each, and distributed over the twelve months of the year, will never give a force that in any serious emergency can be depended on for anything but disaster, even supposing the drills to be honestly put in. We know that they have not always been so—and what has been is likely to occur again. How can such a system produce that mutual confidence which men should feel if suddenly required to act together in large bodies. Where are the facilities for attaining even remotely approaching efficiency in Battalion drill, in Light Infantry movements, in Guard and Piquet duty, &c., &c. Sixteen days of consecutive drill. (I mention that number, not because I particularly approve of it, but simply because it has been fixed only to act as the *ne plus ultra*) in bodies not smaller than Battalions,—where the men would be together in camp or billets,—when every man liable to serve would have to shew himself, and where his absence could not be winked at by any officer even if so inclined, might, and no doubt would be productive of the very best effect, and be marked by very telling results. But this is exactly the style of drill which it is proposed the new force shall *not* have.

It may be said, you are quite wrong, all this is quite attainable under the provisions of the new Bill. I wish I could think so, but I cannot believe for a moment that such was the intention of the framers of the Act. Although it is laid down (Sec. 46.) that the service companies of the Regular Militia may by order of Her Majesty be assembled for a period not exceeding sixteen nor less than eight days in each year at such times and places as may be thought proper for drill and exercise; yet the day's drill is clearly expressed to be one of three hours duration. This is the day's drill for which the men are to be paid, and beyond this the officers could not compel the men to remain in the ranks, to mount guard, &c. And such being the case would be manifestly absurd to bring