

GOSSIP OF THE MILITIA.

Interesting Review of the Military Position of Cape Breton Island.

The Vics' Rifle Shooting Matches—Reported Changes in the Montreal District—Annual Meeting of the 85th Batt.—Ottawa Volunteer Snowshoers—Officers' dinners epidemic—Praise for Canadian-made militia clothing—Annual Meeting of the Ninetieth Batt. Club—Budget from London—Miscellaneous Notes.

Military Matters in Cape Breton.

I WISH in this article to draw the attention of your readers to certain matters in connection with the militia of Cape Breton of which they may be unaware, in the hope that the authorities may be induced to attend thereto.

Let me premise that the Island of Cape Breton is an important strategical point. It has been justly regarded as such from the days when the French, smarting under the loss of the mainland of Nova Scotia, determined to erect there a fortress which should for all time dominate the St. Lawrence, and indeed the North Atlantic. Moved by this design the town of Louisburg was founded, and such fortifications erected as made it not only the guarantee of France's continued possession of Canada, but a menace to the English colonies on the Atlantic sea-board. The two sieges by which that place was reduced are among the most gallant exploits in the annals of the British arms.

Subsequently to the Treaty of Paris the English Government turned its attention to the settlement of the Island. A new site was chosen for the capital. Sydney, on the splendid harbour of that name, was founded. Some twenty-nine acres of ground overlooking the harbour were reserved for military purposes; two earthworks were thrown up; and valuable buildings, consisting of officers' quarters, barracks, stores, etc., were erected. An Imperial garrison was maintained here until the outbreak of the Crimean war. Besides all this a strong earthwork was built at Sydney Mines, commanding the entrance of the harbour. All this valuable property Canada received as a gift from the Imperial Government, burdened, as we may suppose, with an implied trust. Let us see how that trust has been fulfilled.

The military grounds at Sydney have been for years leased at a nominal rental. The lessee in turn rents to the county the buildings, which are used as poor and insane asylums. It is with much difficulty that the local forces can secure enough ground for the purpose of drill, and it is rumoured that pressure will have to be brought before the grounds can be restored to their proper use. The earthworks have been levelled by French marines from the French ships which have for some years made Sydney their summer station. They performed this service in return for the lessee's permission to drill on the military grounds. The buildings have fallen into a ruinous state, and "influence" and "pressure" have to be brought to get the most urgent repairs. The stone from the earthworks at Sydney Mines has been sold clandestinely to church builders, which is "beating swords into pruning hooks" with a vengeance; the guns have been disposed of to unknown purchasers. So much for the manner in which Canada has treated these magnificent properties.

As for the militia force enrolled in this Island, it is totally inadequate. It consists of the 94th Battalion of Infantry—5 companies, and the Sydney Field Battery. The former is a serviceable corps, but working under enormous difficulties. The latter is a new organization and being armed with the obsolete 9 pr. S. B. gun; but little can be expected of it until it receives a more modern armament. It can be proved to a demonstration that the

DISTRIBUTION OF THE MILITIA IN DISTRICT NO. 9

is very unfair, and regulated upon no principles of local necessity or of national advantage. The inequality in distribution is explained in this way: After Confederation the authorities at Halifax accepted the rolls as fast as they arrived, without regard to locality, so that, by the time those from distant Cape Breton arrived, the quota for the Province was complete. For four years the Island had no protection whatever. In 1871 the organization of a provisional battalion was authorized, but beyond this no attempt has ever been made by the authorities to remedy the injustice; on the contrary any effort on our part to increase the force has been discouraged. The mainland of Nova Scotia has of cavalry 1 troop, of garrison artillery 12 batteries, and of infantry 56 companies; as against Cape Breton's 1 battery of artillery and 5 companies of infantry.

On the face of it this is a most unequal showing. Cape Breton has one-fifth the population of the province, and on that ground alone is entitled to an increase. But further: The island is the seat of an enormous coal mining industry. Millions of capital are invested and this in case of strike demands protection. Outbreaks at the mines have occurred, and will no doubt occur in future. In 1861 a wing of H. M. 17th Regiment was sent down from Halifax to quell a riot at Sydney Mines. In 1876 three companies of the 94th were able to save property of enormous value at the same place, and later, in 1883, two companies of the 94th were under arms at Lingan for upwards of two months. These facts surely warrant an increase in the force.

It is besides a well-known fact that the coal mines in Cape Breton are the only ones on the Atlantic seaboard of North America. This makes them important in an Imperial point of view. In the event of a war between England and any European power, in which of course Canada would have to share the general liability to attack, Cape Breton would prove our most vulnerable spot. The enemy's design no doubt would be to fit out an enormous number of steamers of the mercantile class; these, with coal obtained from our mines, could maintain themselves on the coast, and harass and destroy merchant shipping coming out of the St. Lawrence, of which important Canadian outlet this Island has always been regarded as the key. It is a well known

fact that France has in the summer season upwards of 4,000 sailors of the naval reserve at St. Pierre. What think you would be their first objective point in the event of war? The French are at the present day thoroughly well informed of the value of this island. Their sounding parties are at work every season. Who can account for the indifference displayed by the authorities towards this most valuable island? Food for reflection can be found in the foregoing facts.

I must say here that the inhabitants of this island afford the best material for soldiers I know of, and this is the judgment of men whose opinion is worth incomparably more than my own. The majority of the people are of Highland Scottish origin and take to arms as naturally as did their famous ancestors. Strong, sturdy and used to fatigue the troops raised in Cape Breton would be the boast of Canada.

A SCHEME OF DEFENCE.

Having now exposed the weakness of the force in Cape Breton, and shown the urgent necessity of an increase upon local and national grounds, let me indicate the direction in which reform should come, and present a scheme by which the island could be placed in a tolerable state of defence.

1. There should be a battery of the largest guns at Sydney Mines, the entrance to Sydney Harbour, a most important coaling station and port of call, and the landing place of several Atlantic cables. Of course the vandalism there would have to be stopped, and the authorities impressed with the idea that their functions are not to destroy but preserve the Government property. If the construction and equipment of this battery proved too expensive, and the probabilities are that it would, then it would be advisable to establish there a torpedo and mining corps, as affording a measure of protection. No finer body of men could be found from which to recruit than the men of the Low Point shore. It may not be generally known that a battery of garrison artillery was enrolled at Sydney Mines so long ago as 1878, but for reasons best known to the Department, and of which every one else is ignorant, nothing further was ever done.

2. As supplemental to the battery just mentioned the field battery at Sydney should be made as efficient as possible. That town is the harbour terminus of two railways leading from the outmines on the sea-coast, and when the extension through Cape Breton of the Intercolonial, now under construction, is completed, will be the Atlantic terminus of the Canadian system of railways. By these a flying battery could be at any given place at the shortest notice. The battery should be complete in its equipments, with waggons, etc., and the allowances of horses per gun should be six not four.

3. There should be an immediate increase in the infantry force. In the Annapolis Valley, within easy reach by rail of the Imperial garrison at Halifax, there are three full batteries, the 68th, 69th and 72nd, in all 25 companies. The farther east and the more remote from Halifax, and consequently where the strongest force should be, and where attack would first be made, we have the weakness before described. There can be no possible justification for this neglect. Some years ago when Cape Bretonians were beginning to agitate for an artillery force one of our leading citizens was instructed from headquarters to "fight against it." Why should this spirit prevail, or indeed exist. I am not prepared to say how much increase should be made in the infantry, but the 94th should at any rate, and as a beginning, be made an 8 company battalion.

4. Finally there should be at Sydney, a central position, a full supply of military stores. None whatever are now kept in the island. This, it need not be said, is extremely shortsighted, and should a sudden emergency arise the country would soon have proof of it.

In addition to the foregoing it would be highly advantageous if suitable earthworks were thrown up at each mine. This could, I believe, be done at little or no expense to the Government, as the proprietors no doubt would be glad to contribute to their own defence.

I trust that if this communication reaches the notice of the authorities they will give their earnest attention to the suggestions herein contained. All thinking men in Cape Breton are agreed that in the matter of defence we are woefully slack. As the country spends annually large sums on the militia it would be well to see that we get good value for the money, and that the active force is distributed upon intelligent principles, and with due regard to internal defence and protection in time of war. These being, as I apprehend, the only arguments which justify the existence and support of the militia of Canada.

MILITIAMAN.

Montreal.

TWO of the three proposed matches of last week have taken place in the Victoria Rifles' Armoury shooting gallery. On the 2nd inst. the handsome gold medal presented by Lt.-Col. Henshaw was shot for and Staff-Sergt. Shaw had the honour of being its first winner. This medal is put up for monthly competition during the winter months—the highest aggregate scorer to receive a miniature at the end of the season, and each monthly winner to have his name placed on a clasp and attached.

A series of the popular silver spoon competitions has been arranged, one being offered for each Saturday of six consecutive weeks. Aggregate prizes, open and green, are already secured—the former by the entry fees and the latter by presentation from Lieut. Meakins. The first competition, on the 4th inst., showed 30 entries; and Staff Sergeant Shaw collared the spoon with 42 points, 5 shots each at 200 and 500. Five of the competitors ran over 40 points, or "inner" average.

Later on this week, or early in next, a team from the staff-sergeants is to shoot a team from No. 3 (or, to satisfy the Toronto critic, "C") company. Prize, a barrel of flour, to be donated by the losing team to one of the charitable institutions.

The recruit drills and non-com. officers' class meetings are being held weekly. Aspirants for enrolment, or stripes, have to pass rigid examinations before getting either. The sergeants' mess is soon to be ornamented with a large combination photographic picture of the active members of 1887, done up in the best style of W. Notman & Son. The mess numbers 30 active and 9 honorary members.

BUSBY.

The *Star* says:—The report that the Militia Department proposes to amalgamate the 5th and 6th Military Districts has caused considerable adverse comment among members of the local corps. It appears, however, that a complete amalgamation of the two brigades is not intended, the proposition being to combine the two districts as to command only, one Deputy Adjutant General exercising command over both districts, but there being a Brigade Major for each as at present, and each district still maintaining its individuality with its separate camp of exercise.

The reports which come to the surface every year about this time, as to proposed changes in the district staff, are once more in circulation. This season's rumours are to the effect that Lieut.-Col. Harwood, D.A.G. of the 6th district, is to be retired, that Lt.-Col. VanStraubenzie of the 5th district will be transferred to another district, and that Lieut.-Col. Duchesnay, D.A.G. of number seven district, Quebec, will be brought to Montreal to command both the 5th and 6th districts.