

same rude log; the same fire warmed their feet; and the same laugh was provoked from them by the quaint and characteristic tales of those who passed the midnight hours in stirring the embers of the dying fire, and relating what they felt would afford amusement to their officers. Here was a fellowship—a companionship, which, without one moment losing sight of the relative positions of the parties, blended all in concord, and left with the soldier not the most distant desire for change. He knew his duties, and he performed them; and when these were faithfully discharged, he enjoyed the intervening hours in a spirit which could leave no cause for lament that he had chosen the noble profession of a soldier. How such a man would have indulged in his rude witticisms, could he have anticipated that a time would arrive when a new “dynasty” of military men should arise, whose chief object it should be, not to seek laurels for themselves, but to compliment each other on the gallant deeds performed by their regiments long before they were born, or, at least, out of leading-strings, and to assume a credit for these deeds to themselves.

These were the good old days of simplicity in the character and bearing of a soldier. But war and peace necessarily render that character dissimilar. In the former state, too much vigor is infused into the physical and moral man, by a constant series of exciting scenes, in which he finds himself an important actor, to admit of his entertaining any more predominating feeling than that of proud identification with the glorious results achieved by the common valor. He feels that he is looked upon as one of the connecting-links in the great chain which binds the glorious destinies of his country—that he is respected in proportion to the service he is enabled to render to her—however humble the mode—and it is his pride to know that, when a nation's praise goes forth in thanks for an important victory, he is one of those to whom that homage is paid. With such inducements for adhesion to the standard of his country—such means afforded him to vary the scene of his dangers and of his service, to indulge in that desire for change which is natural to man in every condition of life, and yet to know that, if there be any perceptible or lengthened diminution of his comfort, it is because it is beyond the control of his officer to prevent that which is equally inflicted upon himself. With such inducements, I repeat, to be true to the flag of his country, the soldier feels that it would be a blindness of infatuation to forsake the manifold advantages he enjoys, for the purpose of following an *ignis fatuus*, which may lead to his utter destruction, and certainly cannot better his condition. Hence it is that in war, when the mind and the body are actively employed, desertions are of far less frequent occurrence than when no such state of honorable excitement exists.

But, during a period of profound peace, when there is nothing to animate the mind or to excite interest—when no vista of glory is dimly seen in the distance—when a soldier's life is consumed in an unceasing round of drills, parades, and guard-mountings—when the same unvarying roster of duty is presented to him, likening his toil in a great degree to that of the slave—and when, if change of scene be offered, he finds it unaccompanied by any of those strong excitements which are inseparable from a condition of war, it is the less surprising that a morbid feeling, inducing listlessness and apathy, and even loathing of his condition, should eventually take possession of his mind, until recourse is finally had to that step which he thinks will lead to his relief, but which, experience satisfies him, not only makes real that suffering which is fancied, but shuts him out from every prospect of a return to the enjoyment of those actual benefits he has so thoughtlessly and so guiltily relinquished.

Another superinducing cause of the frequency of desertion in the British army at the present day is, in my opinion, the institution of libraries (by no means, in many instances, select) in the several corps, and the direction of the minds of the men to subjects utterly unsuited to their position. These, in expanding his intellect, tend to give to the soldier—especially if he be a young man—an unduly exalted opinion of himself, and to induce a contempt for the position he occupies. Gradually he is led to infer that his education and talents are far beyond his present limited sphere, and looking on the uniform he wears as a badge of servitude, determines on seizing the first favorable opportunity to rid himself of it for ever. Nor is this desire in any way diminished by the practice to which I have, in strong deprecation, alluded, of giving dinners to each other, and indulging in sentimental toasts and opinions which are, I maintain, unsuited to a soldier's condition.

I may offer, in illustration of this view of the subject, a circumstance that occurred in the 23rd Regiment, not long previous to their embarkation for the West Indies. Two corporals' guards were in the habit of mounting daily in Kingston—one at the hospital, the other at the ordnance, and a plan was laid by both non-commissioned officers on duty on one particular day to desert with the whole of their command. However, the men, who had necessarily been tampered with, disclosed the intention, and it was defeated. The corporals were confined, tried by a court-martial, convicted, and sent to the penitentiary. And here it is to be remarked that they were both young, good-looking and intelligent, had received a tolerable education, and were not only able penmen, but possessed of that shrewdness and sagacity which so often obtains for a clever soldier the soubriquet of “Lawyer.” Their guilt, therefore, was, in all probability, the result of that desire to better a condition which the estimate they had formed of their own capabilities had led them to be-

lieve was not what it ought to be. It was fortunate that the men, not acknowledging the same refined influence, conceived it to be a duty incumbent on them to regard their oath.

I have stated on the authority of Sir John Colborne, that the number of deserters, between 1815 and 1838 inclusive, was at least 5,000. Correct statistics of desertion since that period I have not been able to obtain, but they cannot be much less than 500, for at Kingston alone, I know the number up to the 20th of September 1844, to have been 215. This mania has, as I have already remarked, been carried to a greater pitch in Kingston than in any other part of Upper Canada, inasmuch as every person owning a lot of whatsoever description, was at one time compelled to adopt the utmost precaution to prevent it from falling into the hands of deserters.

That there could be no other cause for desertion, to the enormous extent we have seen, than the mere caprice of men tired of the monotony of their position, and eager for change, is obvious from the fact that Sir Richard Armstrong, the commander of the troops in the Western section of the Province, had from the first moment of his assumption of the charge in 1841, directed his earnest attention to the subject, and caused every measure to be adopted which could possibly have the effect of lessening the evil: and courts martial, which had heretofore taken place to a very great extent, were only resorted to on urgent occasions, while the means taken to remove all ground for this tribunal were many and efficacious. The most scrupulous regard was moreover had to the comfort of those who, long experience had taught the gallant General, might occasionally be subject to the petulance of their Officers, or to the much more decided severity of the non-commissioned ranks; and at his periodical inspections, the men have at all times been enjoined to make known the slightest ground of complaint.

It was not therefore owing to oppression, or injustice, or any neglect of their comfort that these men cast themselves upon their adventurous course, but simply with a view to the indulgence of that wayward love of change—that vain and unseasonable desire of bettering their condition, which the near proximity of the United States—the land of presumed liberty—seemed most calculated to gratify.

Two other motives are assigned by Sir Richard, who seems deeply to have studied the subject, for the extreme prevalence of an evil, which, it seems, no caution can anticipate or prevent. The first of these, is the addiction to drunkenness which prevades almost all classes of people, and is the besetting sin of the country; and which naturally extends itself to the soldiers who are invited to spend their money in that manner. The second, is the persevering efforts of American citizens, having constant communication with the Canadian shore, and with whom it seems to be a pride and a duty to seduce as many men as they can, from their allegiance to a country they conceive to be hostile to their own. Nor this with any view to avail themselves of their services, for as has been seen, no sooner is the treason accomplished, then the traitor is held up to ignominy, and made to undergo all the humiliation consequent on his credulity. In the moment of his intoxication, he greedily clutches the false hopes held out to him by the artful deluder—compromises himself by a pledge, and then, without energy to disenthral himself, and at once ashamed and afraid of the intention being discovered, even if it be not put in execution, blindly yields himself to the infatuation, and takes the step that leads to his ruin.

In supposing that they are precluded from returning to the country, as the majority of deserters do, they labor under a misconception. Very many have returned—subjected themselves to the penalties imposed by a Court Martial, and then returned to their duty. But the most inconceivable thing of all is the conduct of those who with the experience of all the obloquy which attaches even to a first dereliction of duty, have the hardihood not only to repeat the offence, but even a third time to pursue the same course. A second desertion should, in my opinion, seldom be pardoned—a third never, for the ranks of a Regiment are only disgraced by the restoration to them of men whose villainy is of the most hardened kind, and whose unblushing example cannot fail to operate unfavorably on those who, although now untainted, may at some future period, indulge in the same propensity, with the same prospect of impunity.

It has ever appeared to me (and I confess my surprise that no officer of the British army, serving in Canada, should have promulgated the same opinion,) that it would be good policy to issue a proclamation of pardon to all those soldiers who have deserted once, but that wherever a second case occurred, the party should be condemned to the Penitentiary for a certain number of years, and if taken a third time, he should, after having been tried and convicted by a Court Martial, be shot. The punishment of the Penitentiary, for a few years, has nothing appalling in it, to the outward eye, but surround a man with the imposing ceremonies of a military execution, and the lesson will go far to check the evil. Even for a first offence, committed under aggravated circumstances, a deserter should be made to suffer death.

The proclamation I suggest, being an act of oblivion of the offence, would have the effect of removing that stigma which now