

RANDOM THOUGHTS ON RIFLE SHOOTING.

BY AN OLD VOLUNTEER.

II.

It was in 1861—doubtless stimulated thereto by the example of the mother country—that the first rifle matches were held in this Province. The first in Toronto, the next in Montreal, both impromptu and modest affairs, got up by the Volunteer officers, who were the principal contributors to the funds required for the occasion. In the following year a rifle association was formed at Ottawa—the first organization of the kind in the country—which was followed at a later period by another at Toronto. The latter still exists; the former, since its last annual match, has shown no signs of vitality. In the same year, through the instrumentality of the late Colonel Jarvis, of Toronto, an attempt was made to organize a Provincial Association on a large scale. The House being in session at the time in Quebec, a public meeting was held in one of the committee rooms of the Parliament buildings for this purpose. After a great deal of "tall" talking on the subject, resolutions were passed, by which it was decreed that there should be such an association. His Excellency the Governor General consented to be its patron, Sir Allan MacNab was appointed its President, and the other officials complete and in due form. The bantling was ushered into the world, but must have been stolen at its birth, for it has never since been heard of; the good resolutions that had been passed, furnishing their quota, like so many others, towards macadamizing that locality which is never mentioned to "ears polite." Notwithstanding this abortive attempt, the Volunteers themselves were quite alive to the very great importance of rifle practice, and with this end in view, various district associations were organized in the different brigade divisions. Some of these still exist, and have their annual rifle matches; as for instance, the Frontier Rifle Association in Lower Canada, the St. Lawrence, Toronto and Hamilton Associations. The latter has affiliated itself with the National Rifle Association of England, and in 1864 competed at its annual match for the bronze medal presented to it by that body. The others which had started into being, after a short and fitful existence, seem as if they had died gradually from inanition. Ottawa, the pioneer association, after holding three successful matches, in 1862, 1863, and 1864, being amongst the number: "its place knows it no more" at present. Let us hope that the rest of the sentence, "forever, may not also have to be added. It is not surprising that such should be the case, from the lack of encouragement from those in authority, and the apathy that has been shown by the influential and moneyed class, who should have afforded their influence and support, as is done in England. It is unfair that the heavy tax required should fall entirely upon those who can least afford it—the Volunteers themselves—who are mulcted of their time in addition: no light tax in a country like ours, while trying to acquire a knowledge intended to be useful for all.

The year 1864 seems to have been the year in which the efforts of the various associations culminated, and was the most prosperous one of their career, taking the Militia Report of that year as a guide. At that date there were seven regularly organized district associations in proper working order, having each its annual match, at which were distributed prizes of the aggregate value of \$5,668 05. In addition to these there were twenty minor associations, either regimental or company, which also had meetings, distributing prizes in the aggregate

to the value of \$1,792 80. In the following year a very perceptible falling off had taken place; the meetings were less numerous, while the total amount of prizes reached only the sum of \$3,188 87. This falling off is further evidenced by the diminution in the purchase of ammunition from the Militia Department for practice. In 1864, \$1,471 13 were expended for this purpose, while in 1865 the modest sum of \$553 was thought sufficient. The whole of the above sums, excepting an infinitesimal portion, were supplied from the Volunteer ranks, extraneous aid having been furnished in doses quite homoeopathic.

In 1863 Montreal, in which no rifle association had ever been organized, made a supreme effort, and held a rifle match that stands pre-eminently the first on the list of any ever held in the country. The proceedings lasted for ten days, and the value of the prizes distributed amounted to the very handsome sum of \$2,145. This great match brought together all the best riflemen in the country, and the shooting was of a very high order of merit. It was then shown that we had amongst us marksmen who would have been quite able to hold their own even in the trying lists of Wimbledon. Montreal, having made this great effort, seems to have exhausted herself, for since then she has made no sign.

So much for what the Volunteers did of themselves, with very little external aid—so little, indeed, that it hardly deserves mention. Many of the associations first formed have fallen through, and this is not to be wondered at, when we reflect upon the difficulties that they have had to contend against, and the scant encouragement which they have received. It would have required little to have kept alive the excellent spirit which had thus afforded evidence of its existence throughout the country. It would have been a little matter for those in authority to have stepped in and guided it to useful ends. Those of means and position should also have evinced some interest, and have come forward to promote and direct the popular feeling. Had this been done, what a stimulus would have been given to rifle shooting, and in a defensive point of view, what could be more important? The opportunity went by: can it be recovered?

Let us now turn and see what has been done towards this most important part of the instruction of the Volunteer. Beyond the mere issue of targets to the large cities and county towns, and the annual supply of sixty rounds of ball ammunition to each Volunteer, nothing has been done towards the promotion of good shooting in the Volunteer force. No systematic action for the provision of rifle ranges, or a course of instruction adapted to its circumstances, has yet been initiated for it. Notwithstanding that so much has been done by the present able Adjutant-General to improve the morale and efficiency of the force—and no one who knew what it was previous to his advent to office, and what it is now, will deny him his due meed of praise—more yet remains a great deal to be done in this particular direction. Drill and discipline are both necessary and important; without them the Volunteer force would degenerate into an armed mob. But excellence in these should not be sought after to the prejudice of more essential qualifications. If Volunteers can act together with celerity and intelligence, and for this purpose are trained to the simplest and readiest formations, without seeking for that nicety of evolution and strict precision so dear to the military mind, all that is necessary for them to know is attained. The individual soldier may not be very well set up, or very smart and soldierly in his appearance; but if he is a sure shot up to 600 yards, knowing his weapon thoroughly, and having full confidence in its use, then we have a very dangerous customer indeed, even if he be somewhat unsteady in the ranks, and is not always clear on the subject of his right and left. Thoroughly trained and skillful riflemen in a country like ours—

men who felt that they carried a life in their hands for every round in their pouch—would be a power whose value we could hardly over-estimate the value of.

To effect this thoroughly, every corps in the country should have proper and convenient facilities afforded it for rifle practice. Ranges and targets should be provided for this purpose, with a liberal hand, even to the detriment of other matters not so essentially necessary. The Volunteers themselves like rifle practice, and would need but little encouragement to go into it with a will. Nothing would tend more to keep them together, and give them that esprit de corps, which a little emulation so wholesomely fosters. Having done this, the proper authorities should next encourage the formation of Rifle Associations in each Brigade Division. To those, properly organized and in proper working order, holding each its annual match, prizes should be given. As for instance, each efficient working association should be authorized to claim a certain sum, say equivalent to that subscribed by itself, for distribution in prizes. This should also be supplemented by the annual distribution to each district of a rifle, for competition, to members only of each particular association, of the best and most approved pattern, either Whitworth or Rugby. By this means a certain number of the best weapons would become annually distributed in the country, and our marksmen made familiar with their use. A small money prize, and the chance of the best shot securing a valuable weapon, would stimulate practice wonderfully.

Having thus arranged for the preliminary exercise of our marksmen at these District Associations, which ought to be looked on as a sort of Normal schools for rifle shooting, the next step should be to provide a larger theatre for the exercise of their abilities, somewhat analogous to what Wimbledon offers to the marksmen of England. For this purpose there should be organized a central or governing body for the whole, let it be called the Dominion Rifle Association, I suppose that would now be the correct term to give it, which should absorb into itself all the minor or district associations, these being affiliated with it, as the County Associations of England are with the National Rifle Association. A body of this description, a reality, and not a simulacrum as Carlyle would say, having for members men of mark and note in the community, could, by its power and influence, do much to place rifle shooting on a more satisfactory footing, and develop to any extent a power that now lies next to dormant in our midst. It could frame laws so as to ensure similarity of action, it would serve as a Court of Appeal to settle controverted points, and its influence for good would be immense.

Having an association of this description, round which all the minor ones would gravitate. Having every Volunteer corps in the country connected with it either directly, or indirectly through its local association, it would have a voice in the country that would always ensure for it respectful attention. Having weight, it could bring a pressure to bear in the right quarter, that would be of the greatest utility. This can never be effected by the disjointed and disunited efforts of any number of isolated bodies, each working for itself in its own narrow sphere, with no aspiration beyond its own circumscribed orbit. If union is strength, how pre-eminently would such be the case, if riflemen were united in one common course of action. Now that the grand union of the Provinces has been effected, would seem to be the auspicious moment for the formation of such a body as I desire to see organized, and what ought to grow in power and influence with the growth of the new Dominion.

Such an association, national in its character, should hold an annual rifle match, on a scale second only to the one at Wimbledon. The Confederate Government should foster its growth, in following the example of Her Most Gracious Majesty, by giving such a prize for annual competition, as would make it worth