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General Luard and the Active Militia.

A letter addressed to the Toronto *Mail*, of the 20th ult., by Major Macpherson, Governor General's Foot Guards, Ottawa, places before the country in a clear light the urgent necessity of extending the facilities for instructing the officers and men of our active militia in the duties of *soldiers* and in the modern science of war. Major Macpherson says:—

Since General Luard commenced his inspection he has been made the subject of some severe editorials and letters in the columns of leading newspapers for the course he has seen fit to pursue, and the remarks he has made respecting the efficiency of the active militia of Canada. The writers of these articles do not by any means represent the sentiments of the whole force, and, as one holding contrary opinions, I would ask your permission to be allowed to place before the public some of the views entertained by myself and others

In the first place, I would desire to call attention to the fact that the regiments which have been inspected were not suddenly called out without warning, that they were not taken by surprise in any way, but that the period selected was known some time beforehand. Every preparation was deliberately made, and every effort put forth to make as respectable an appearance as possible; in fact they were seen at their best, and if under the most favorable circumstances the force does not come up to the standard fixed by the inspecting officer, what would its value be if suddenly called out for active service against a well organized and thoroughly drilled enemy? If I am not mistaken, General Luard has acted as Adjutant in the volunteer force of Great Britain, and may therefore be fairly supposed to understand the difficulties of our position, and to be able and willing to make all due allowance for our shortcomings. Instead of finding fault, I think that every officer of the active militia who has its welfare at heart should thank him most sincerely for the words he has spoken. They have done more to attract the attention of the whole country to the force than anything that has occured since the Fenian raids, and it is earnestly to be hoped will be the cause of a change in the present system

In the next place the language of General Luard is not in any way stronger than that used by his predecessor. When Sir Selby Smyth first came out he strenuously endeavored to place matters on a proper footing, but after a time, appeared to accept things as he found them. Still, even so late as 1878, when his views had become modified by four years residence in the country, in his annual report he used those words:—"The military profession requires education as much as those of the learned professions, and it is a delusion to think that it is time enough when alarm arises to call a *levée en masse* for the safety of a country An armed and undisciplined multitude of officers and men are but a rope of sand, and as dangerous to their friends as to their foes. * * * This paid training of the militia has been reduced to a minimum, only one half of the force being embodied for twelve days' drill in each year, and such training as that amounts to is almost useless, being really little more than an armed muster at battalion and company headquarters." Referring to the annual grant, he points out, that after certain expenses are paid, "there remains for the drill pay and incidental expenses attendant on drill and training only the meagre and insufficient sum of $155,-023. This sum is quite inadequate to keep the 42,000 militia of Canada in a proper state of training and effectiveness, amounting approximately to the cost of a single British battalion of the line. What progress can a general officer make in this case? He can only feel himself a source of disappointment to the excellent and loyal body of officers and men under his command, who look to him for support." Again, referring to the drill he says: "They cannot teach who have had no chance to learn, and how can they learn unless Government provides the means?"

Now, if words means anything, these quotations clearly show that it was General Sir Selby Smyth's deliberate opinion that the active militia of Canada were an armed and undisciplined body of officers and men, as dangerous to their friends as to their foes; that their drill was almost useless, and little better than armed musters; that their officers were incapable of instructing, for the reason that they themselves had no chance to learn; and that the bottom of the whole thing was the quite inadequate sum of money allowed by Government for drill and training.

Turning back a few years ago to the report of 1872, we find that Colonel Robertson Ross expressed very much the same views He says: "I have no confidence in the system of allowing corps to perform their annual drill independently at local headquarters in drill-sheds Practical rifle instruction and target practice cannot be carried out at all in drill-sheds, and skirmishing only very imperfectly taught; yet these are the most essential military exercises. It is not enough for officers and men to obtain some knowledge of regimental drill and duties. Officers who are afforded an opportunity of learning only this part of their duties can gain but little insight into many other duties required of them in the event of emergency. * * * * * In time of danger the ranks of the militia of Canada have always been filled with men, but untrained men and undisciplined valor does not constitute military strength or national security." Now, I think it will be at once apparent that the views of General Luard and his predecessors are identical, the only difference being in the method of conveying them. He chose to express the thoughts that rose in his mind when actually in the presence of the regiments; they preferred to embody theirs in their annual reports. The latter are not read by many, and the language used, being of a general nature, and referring to the force as a whole, each person was quite at liberty to suppose that the strictures were intended for every other regiment but his own; therefore no offence was taken. But, when General Luard draws aside the mantle in which we have been wrapping ourselves, and in a few brief, soldierly sentences reveals the fact that "our" regiment is "an armed and undisciplined multitude of officers and men, as dangerous to our friends as to our foes;" that "our" training "amounts to little more than an armed muster;" that "our" men do not appear to have a knowledge of the use of their rifles or of skirmishing properly, the most essential of military exercises; and that while the physique is good and courage undoubted, we should not forget that untrained men and undisciplined valor does not constitute military strength; there is instantly a great row, and columns are filled with complaints as to want of consideration, and ignorance of the force, &c., &c.

When an inspecting general finds that if a regiment were suddenly called out for active service against any fairly organized and disciplined force it would be utterly useless, which is the kinder thing to do—to point out the defects in a straightforward, manly way, or to shut his eyes to all shortcomings and distribute unmerited praise?

If the inspecting officer were to make it quite clear that everything was as good as could be expected for the money, all would be right Of the spectators who attend an inspection, few are able to detect mistakes, everything appears to go smoothly, and when the visiting officer declares the regiment to bear the evidence of careful training, and to be in an efficient state, they very naturally come to the conclusion that there is in operation an admirable system under which, at a very small expenditure of money, the country has at command a well-disciplined force, available either for the purpose of internal disorders, or of starting off on a sudden emergency to repel an attack on the frontier

That such is not the case is a fact only too well known to every officer who has spent any length of time in it. One regiment to which General Luard is said to have spoken in very plain terms was thus reported by the brigade-major of the district, who has not only been an officer in the regular army, but has had a long experience in connection with the force in Canada:—No. 1 Company he found well drilled, but without tunics belonging to the company, those they had having been purchased by the officers. I shall give his exact words respecting two other companies:—"I inspected No. 3 at ——— on the 29th November, and accompanied by Lieut.-Col. ———. I was not in any way pleased with this company; its drill was indifferent. The physical appearance of the men was very small; some young, others very old. They had little uniform, giving an unsoldierlike appearance. The arms and accoutrements were fairly clean. Target practice was performed The company had little instruction worth speaking of. I inspected No. 5 on the 30th November, accompanied by the officer commanding and the adjutant. The company was composed of very fine men indeed, but they had received no instruction. Company drill, bad; manual and firing exercises, indifferent; skirmishing, bad. The officers wore the uniform of the —th, with civilian wide-awakes as a head-dress and the men generally were without uniform." Last year the Deputy Adjutant-General of the District, also a regular soldier of large experience, thus describes it after eight days' drill in camp:—"The regiment did not turn out as well as last year, the clothing being much soiled, the belts and pouches dirty, and the arms only fairly clean. Major ——— put the regiment through the manual and firing exercises, which were indifferently performed, also the battalion movements. I noticed several under-sized men in the rank. The weather was very wet the night before the inspection, and the wind so high the following morning as to prevent the men from hearing the words of command distinctly, which might partly account for their unsteadiness, as well as for the state of their accoutrements &c." Nothing that General Luard has said has been as strong as this, but, if it had been, it is surely better to recognize that he is only doing his duty, and can have nothing but the good of the force at heart, and instead of grumbling, to bring forward some scheme by which the force may be placed on a really sound footing.

The decreased number of days the active militia are now required to drill, and the fact that only one-half of them are allowed to do at all, clearly indicate that the force has ceased to excite that interest which it did when there was an appearance of its being necessary, and I believe there are some who have come to the conclusion that it could be very well dispensed with altogether. The political horizon has been so long clear that they seem to have come to regard it as impossible that it could ever be clouded again If that is really the case, then the force is a useless burden on the country, and the sooner it is done away with the better But is it the case?

We have in Canada the raw material of as fine an army as can be raised anywhere on the face of the earth. In strength, stature, courage, stamina, intelligence, and all that goes to make the soldier, our young men are everything that could be desired, and it is but necessary to give them a soldier's training to make them as fine a body of troops as any nation can boast of. But this cannot be done in twenty-four evening drills of one and a half hours each, and an expenditure of $1 per man. Beyond the honour of wearing the uniform we can offer no inducement to join, or after joining to remain, that our men are constantly changing. Each year finds us with a new set of men, or at least a large proportion of new men, so that we have to commence *de novo from the beginning, and we never achieve that state of fair efficiency* that we might be expected to do if they remained on to the end of three years' service. If we tried to enforce the law and compel them to do so, men would not join at all, and we are therefore obliged to let them come and go at will. As a rule they remain just long enough to get a very superficial knowledge, and leave as soon as the novelty has worn off. Officers of the right kind are difficult to get. Many would gladly join, but the heavy and unreasonable expense they are required to go to, and the constant trouble and anxiety connected with the position, prevent all but the most enthusiastic from accepting it. It will strike every thinking person as being somewhat strange that while a general officer should be valued at $1,000 per annum, an assistant-general at $3,200, a deputy-adjutant-general at $1,700, a brigade-major at $1,200, and an aide-de-camp at $1,000, together with travelling and hotel allowances, the colonel and officers, of a regiment should only be valued at $12 apiece, and the non-commissioned officers and men at $8 apiece, but such is the case; and while the latter are obliged to provide themselves with gloves, winter caps, helmets, etc., the former are obliged within three months of joining, to procure a