

THE STAFF COLLEGE.

From the United Service Gazette.

The 'Times' complains that the officers who distinguished themselves in examination for the Staff do not, after all their labor and display of ability, obtain their fair share of Staff appointments. This would be a very fair ground of complaint, provided that the value of these examinations were an established fact, and that the training thus obtained rendered the successful candidate of greater value for actual service. The inference of our powerful contemporary, who has nailed his colors to the mast in defence of the whole system of examinations for the public service, whether civil or military, is that it does, and that consequently there is an unfair disposal of Staff patronage on the part of our military authorities. It may possibly happen, however, that the military authorities themselves think differently, and that they do not attach quite so much value as the 'Times' to the theoretical science and book learning. They may think that a Staff officer, like any other officer, should be a soldier before everything, and it is just possible that it may occur to them that the Chelsea cram and the flukes which constitute a Chelsea success, are not after all the very best tests by which they are to judge a man's fitness for military appointments.

We believe that if our military authorities should have a little doubt in the matter, they will not be alone in their hesitation. This system of examination for the public service has now had a pretty long trial, and persons who are best qualified to judge of the results of mental training are very much divided in opinion as to whether success in these examinations is conclusive proof of a man's special proficiency in the subjects on which he is examined, much less of his useful mental power and general intelligence. The mode of examination is by printed questions, each question requiring knowledge of a particular fact, and if a man's memory fail him as to that particular fact, it is of no avail that he is well up in everything else connected with the branch of knowledge to which that fact belongs. For example, supposing him to have to deal with a geography paper, he may have a splendid general knowledge of the whole of the physical peculiarities of Russia, its extent, its mountains, its rivers, its mines, and its forests; but if he cannot tell the exact position of the town of Tver, or whether a particular small port or landing-place is on the right or the left bank of the Volga, he must evidently give way to some lucky competitor, who on the previous evening had received that particular piece of information from his grinder. It must be remembered that between the examiners and the grinders a constant warfare exists, each seeking to countermine the other, and both quarrying in the same mine for their examination puzzles. The object of the one is not to seek general knowledge or aptitude, or of the other to teach it, but respectively to find out some hitherto unnoticed knowledge trap into which the unhappy candidate is sure to fall, unless his grinder and his examiners have both happened to hit precisely on the same question. This being the case, the Staff examination is little better than a game of billiards played with closed eyes. The winner wins by a fluke, and as there are many candidates, and nearly as many grinders, it is certain that somebody will be able to make the lucky stroke, and he it is who gets the certificate, and not the man whose general knowledge would have secured his success in an intelligent viva voce examination. There is nobody to blame

for this but the system, and those who stick to it, in spite of the general doubt of its efficacy which prevails amongst real practical soldiers. The fashion has been set to uphold these examinations, and the people have not as yet mustered sufficient moral courage to oppose themselves to the fashion. A man must feel very strong in his own knowledge, before he dares to set himself up against a system which bristles on every side with the pedantries of technical learning. He is somewhat in the position of the plain matter-of-fact layman in the presence of a formidable-looking doctor's prescription. He may know in his heart that it is all "hosh," but the fear of breaking down in giving his reasons for his conviction will keep his mouth shut, even whilst his mind revolts at what he believes to be sheer absurdity. But even supposing the candidate not to succeed merely through a happy coincidence in question-making between examiner and grinder: supposing him to have technical memory enough to provide him with the proper answers to all the questions, are we quite sure even then that the possession of so much technical memory is enough to make him a good staff officer? On the contrary, is it not possible that it may stand alone as the candidate's qualification, who may, in order to fill his mind with that crude array of isolated and unsuggestive facts which is demanded of him, have possibly swept it clear of every other military knowledge, the thinking about which would to a certainty have neutralized all his attempts to achieve his mechanical and technical proficiency? We believe the opinions of the more practical of our military men, the men who have formed their notion of what Staff officers ought to be, in actual service, is that it is quite possible for a man to have passed his examination in the most triumphant manner, to be crammed to the very throat with facts, and "catch-questions," and bits of out-of-the-way detail, and still be likely to make as poor a figure in the camp or the campaign as would the grinder to whose indefatigable "chiffonnierring"—if we may be allowed to coin a word—he owes the formidable array of marks with which he hopes to take the Horse Guards by storm.

There is another point which the 'Times' must not overlook, and that is, that the appointment of aides-de-camp to which it alludes, is a piece of patronage which long usage has given to the Commander-in-Chief, or Lord Lieutenant, or Colonial Governor who requires the assistance of such officers, and that a man having such patronage at his disposal will give it to any relative or friend he may have in the service, as surely as the members of the Right Reverend Bench will bestow all their best livings on their sons, or their sons-in-law, or any one, in fact, who may be connected with them, either by blood or marriage. No body blames the Bishops for thus taking care of their own, nor should any one blame the military men who require aides-de-camp for doing the same. If custom gives them the patronage, they must be allowed to dispense it within certain understood limits as they please, else the patronage is a mere mockery. But it is not; it is a reality, and one of the strongest inducements they have to accept high and responsible office. Lord Palmerston's decision was that no Government could be carried on without patronage, and it was practically sound, however it might offend the scruples of thousands. It is true of military as well as civil government, and the Commander in Chief would only bring a hornet's nest about his ears, were he to ride rough shod over the estab-

lished rules of military patronage, in order to make aides-de-camp places for the successful members of the Staff College.

Battalion Correspondence.

[We shall be obliged if an officer in each Battalion will give us a report, as briefly as consistent with the facts, of any events of interest which take place in his corps, and beg to tender our thanks for favors received.]

FROM WHITBY.

VOLUNTEER BALL.—The officers, non-commissioned officers and men of Companies number one and four of the 34th (Ontario) Battalion held a Union Ball, at the Mechanics' Hall, Whitby, on the night of the 8th instant. The Hall was most tastefully decorated with banners, emblems and trophies of arms, &c. and presented a very pleasing appearance. A very large number were present, and the whole affair reflected a great deal of credit upon the Managing Committee.

QUARTERLY INSPECTIONS.

On Monday, 18th February, Brigade-Major Jackson will inspect the Volunteer Companies at Williamstown and Lancaster respectively, and on Tuesday, the 19th, the three Companies at Cornwall.

CORRESPONDENCE.

To the Editor of The Volunteer Review.

TORONTO, February, 1867

SIR,—Though not professing to belong to either the volunteers or regulars, I have always taken a deep interest in both, and of necessity came to understand a good deal about them; and it is because of this same interest, and for no other reason, that I am about to trouble you and myself with this letter. I mean it to be an honest, out-spoken one, too—not intended to give offence, but to recommend.

There is a certain Volunteer Field Battery, Mr. Editor, with which I have frequently come in contact, and with some of the members of which I was pretty well acquainted. It is not the Toronto Battery, nor is it in the next town to Toronto, but it is somewhere; and should any of the remarks I am about to make fit the Toronto or any other battery, they are heartily welcome to them. Now, Sir, to reverse the order of things, we will begin with the recruit. When a recruit joins the battery, instead of being put under the care of a smart non-commissioned officer or private to initiate him into the mysteries of squad drill—the facings, saluting keeping and changing step, &c.—he is at once seized by the Sergeant-Major and placed with the gun detachment to learn the standing gun drill, next shoved into the ranks, and should there be a march-out or inspection, of course succeeds in making fools of the entire battery. There are men in that battery four and five years, who to this moment do not know how to stand at ease properly. Next come the drivers. Great pains are taken to teach them to execute the standing gun drill with precision, but the meaning of the words "right or left take ground," "shoulders forward," or the directions in which the limbers or waggons should move in coming into action, or limbering up, is never taught them. Then the yearly drill comes on for turning out with horses, and as order is given, some know the meaning of it, others do not, and the whole is thrown into confusion. Some of them get disgusted and