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LITERATURE.

EIGHT YEARS IN CANADA, &c.

EMBRACING A REVIEW OF THE SEVERAL ADMINISTRATIONS OF LORDS DURHAM AND SYDENHAM, SIR CHARLES BAGOT, AND LORD METCALFE;

And Dedicated to the Memories of THE FIRST AND LAST OF THESE DISTINGUISHED DEAD.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "LECARTE," &c.

DE CANADÆ REBUS ET QUIBUSDAM ALIIS.

A difficulty of arrangement having occurred with the only two London publishers to whom the following pages have been submitted, the Author has decided on resuming the usual practice, and publishing in Canada first; thus affording that means of direct communication with other metropolitan publishers, which his absence from London renders a matter of much inconvenience. It will be borne in mind, therefore, by the Canadian reader, that what is now offered to his perusal, was intended for an English public.

[As Deposited at the Office of the Registrar of the Province.]

(CHAPTER VI. CONTINUED.)

Nor was this owing to any undue severity in the discipline, or to any particular dislike of their commanding officers. On the contrary, in the case of the 43rd, where the desertions were so numerous, the colonel was beloved by his men, and yet the strange and seemingly irresistible infatuation continued, as though some unseen power urged them to the commission of an act which, as will be seen presently, brands them with infamy even among the most unprincipled of those with whom they seek refuge. Neither in the 14th was there any of that severity of duty or martinetism which frequently prompts men to attempt an amelioration of their condition. But I now arrive at the important part of the subject.

One might be induced, from the frequency of occurrence of the crime, to suppose that the man who is guilty of desertion, leaves his post and forfeits the solemn obligation he has entered into with his Sovereign, in the assurance that he exchanges a service of tyranny and oppression for the enjoyment of unbounded liberty, and the respect of those among whom he re-casts his destiny—that, as a British soldier, his services when made available in the armies of his newly adopted country, entitle him, from his greater experience, to take rank before his comrades, and to command their esteem; or that whenever he exercises the trade or profession which he may have originally been taught, he is entitled to all the civil privileges and immunities from wrong of the American citizen.

Let the soldier who anticipates such advantages thoroughly disabuse himself. The very contrary is the fact, and they who coolly meditate desertion will do well, before leaping the chasm from which there is no honorable return, to look at the real, and not the artificial, side of the picture which is presented to their view. God has set his seal upon the perjurer as well as upon the murderer, and man is made the instrument of his will, in marking his hatred and contempt of the crime. It is on this immutable principle that although we may love the treason, the traitor can never command our respect, and even among the depraved, those who deliberately violate the sanctity of an oath are looked upon as being even more depraved than themselves. So it is especially with the British deserter. Instead of enjoying that liberty for which he has periled his eternal peace, he finds his condition even worse than that of a slave. If he works for hire, and honestly earns his wages, he is dependent solely on the caprice of him who has engaged his services, for, by legal process, he cannot recover a shilling. And thus, rendered abject and base by the inequality of position he finds to exist between himself and his new associates, he loses sight of the last sentiments of dignity common to man, or, if he descends not deeply and rapidly in the scale of infamy, sighs in vain for the recall of those days when, in the pride of a soldier's chivalrous profession, he walked erect upon the earth, and in the first and noblest land of freedom—England—an honest member of the human family.

Nor is the man who depends upon the exercise of his trade in a more enviable condition than the mere laborer. True, for a brief

season his mechanical dexterity and address may command countenance and support, and, if his transactions be of a ready-money kind, he may contrive to secure a bare existence; but ready-money transactions are neither usual nor profitable, and if with a view to extend his business, he adopt the system of giving credit, he must trust wholly to the good faith of those to whom he accords it, or be prepared to lose sight of that privilege which is not denied the honest American citizen—the power of compelling restitution. If he threaten an appeal to the courts of justice, insult will be added to injury. The person threatened will laugh in his face, and ask him whether he is not a British deserter, and if so, how he can presume to expect that his oath will have any weight, after having perjured himself to his Sovereign. Be even among the mechanics, the proportion of good workmen is comparatively small, and therefore they who devote themselves to it are few in number.

A number of these deluded men enlist in the American army, where security for their fidelity is given in the utter impossibility of their ever returning home, but they are not treated with any consideration, and scarcely ever attain to the rank of a non-commissioned officer. Even while there is assurance that they cannot desert, they are looked upon with a distrustful eye. They are sensible of this, and may be distinguished by a sullen and desponding expression of countenance. They are, it is true, a little better paid and fed than the English soldier, but the system of discipline is much more rigid, and the punishments more severe, and more frequently administered. During the Florida wars, they were invariably sent to encounter pestilence and hardship in every shape, and thousands of these unhappy men have left their bones amid the swamps and fastnesses of that inhospitable region.*

On one occasion, a gentleman connected with one of the public departments in Kingston, visited French Creek, in the vicinity of the Thousand Islands, and the great rendezvous of deserters. During his short stay there he saw about eighty of these unfortunate men working in a ditch nearly mid-waist in mud, and their bodies covered with pustules and ulcers. He described the sight as being in the highest degree disgusting. He was personally known to most of the men, several of whom approached, and told him that they were so heartily tired of the miserable change in their position, that they would cheerfully undergo any punishment that might be inflicted, provided they should be suffered to return. They stated to him, what was the universal complaint, that although they toiled like slave, they could not obtain remuneration for their work, for their task-masters invariably taunted them, when pressed for a settlement, with the assertion that their oath would be without weight in a court of justice.

And what food for reflection is here afforded! When I first entered the service the soldier was looked upon as the hardy veteran, and not in the light in which he is now regarded. There was the same attention to his comfort, but not to his luxurious ease—there was the same *esprit de corps*, but it was one of rivalry in the field: nor was there ever such an absurdity dreamt of as the soldiers of one corps giving a "sumptuous and distinguished entertainment" to the soldiers of another corps, and drinking over wines of the "choicest kind" the health of the Queen—Prince Albert—The Army and Navy—the Duke of Wellington—their respective Colonels—the Ladies, followed by the farce of publication, in the newspapers of the locale, of their misplaced orgies, as if the public could feel any other sentiment than ridicule for these "high-life-below-stairs" proceedings. A rasher of pork—a basin of pea-soup, with bread, and a moderate portion of spirit, were the substantial of the men of those days, and in these the officers often partook with a gusto equal to any that is now derived from an indulgence in these "luxurious viands." Their minds had not been subjected to the influence of a mistaken refinement. As long as a soldier got his food regularly, and his pay—when he could, he thought only of being in the presence of his enemy, and desertion from his colors was, at that period, almost wholly unknown. He knew no greater happiness than to embark in scenes of enterprize, whatever the incidental privations attending them, because he was aware that his officer would share equally in whatever hardships it should be his lot to encounter. The same rude bivouac contained them; their bodies reposed on the same sward or in the same forest; their heads were often pillowed on the

* No doubt many of these men swell the American ranks in Mexico.