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The Volunteer Review,

AND

MILITARY AND NAVAL GAZETTE.

"Unbribed, unbought, our swords we draw,
To guard the Monarch, fence the Law."

OTTAWA, TUESDAY, DEC. 23, 1873.

To CORRESPONDENTS.—Letters addressed to either the Editor or Publisher, as well as Communications intended for publication, must, invariably, be *pre-paid*. Correspondents will also bear in mind that one end of the envelope should be left open, and at the corner the words "Printer's copy" written and a two or five cent stamp (according to the weight of the communication) placed thereon will pay the postage.

PUBLISHER'S NOTICE.

THE end of the present month closes Volume VII. of the VOLUNTEER REVIEW; and during the year we have made out and forwarded accounts to nearly all our Subscribers in arrears for Subscriptions to the REVIEW. Some have promptly paid up their indebtedness—who will please accept our thanks—but by far the larger number have paid no attention to it—to those we give notice now, that if their accounts are not settled before the 1st of January next, we will be under the painful necessity of handing them over to a Lawyer for collection.

THE great importance of training soldiers to the duty of skirmishing has always been recognized, but the use of weapons of precision and long range have necessitated its adoption as the only means of successful attack; its tactical use formerly was to cover

the advance and conceal as far as possible the movements necessary therefor, as well as protect the artillery; this is so far changed that the skirmish line no longer relies on the advance the main body and reserves, but itself becomes the first line by gradual accession and re-inforcements; and the fate of a modern battle will depend almost or altogether on the pertinacity with which the skirmish line holds its ground; and this will always be in proportion to the amount of training acquired by the soldier, the skill of the officer immediately in command, as well as the use of the topographical features of the ground for cover and the steadiness as well as certainty with which the line is reinforced from the reserves.

Those officers, therefore, like General MACDOUGALL, who advocate increased stringency in drill and training and deny the necessity for revolution in our minor tactics are perfectly right, much more will depend on training, in other words drill, than on any quality of mind of the individual soldier; although many military journals are strong advocates of what they are pleased to term individual intelligence, forgetting that an army is a machine to be operated at will and by the intelligence of one individual and there cannot be any other will in operation amongst the machinery. In this case training to instant obedience is the first great element, the remainder are more mechanical operations which the dullest understanding can acquire by practice. The whole question then resolves itself into more constant training over a larger area than a mere barrack yard, carried out with the distinct purpose of adapting the formation to the ground over which the troops are operating. Amongst the many excellent places for effecting this object are on the "Proposed method of attack in skirmish line," by Capt. F. G. S. PARKER, 54th Regiment, which we transcribe, omitting the diagrams from No. LXXIV. of the Journal of the Royal United Service Institution. We omit the quotation from Lieut. F. M. the Duke of Wurtemberg respecting the persistent training of the Prussian infantry to *firing fighting* as well as their efforts to stimulate *apell* (disciplined intelligent obedience) as without both acquirements an army would be worth nothing, and at once introduce our readers to the gist of Captain PARKER's scheme.

"All extended formations as yet introduced to notice appear to me inapplicable to the daily drill of our army. Our regiments are so weak when on the home establishment that after deducting the requirements of detachments, guards, fatigues, &c., it is rarely, (excepting during the periods such regiments are at the Curragh or Aldershot) that a sufficient number can be mustered for a really efficient parade on the present system of advancing to alternate half battalions or of skirmishing with the prescribed support and reserves. I need

scarcely say more upon this than that I have myself in Ireland seen a head quarter parade for many months average four companies of single rank with only from sixteen to twenty men per company. At Aldershot and the Curragh where these drawbacks do not exist to such an extent, I have never found the men well in hand skirmishing, as at present laid down, the skirmishers get excited and continually rush from one extreme to the other; they open out too much and so lose the power of quick concentration or they crowd too much (especially if cover be frequent) and so expose themselves to artillery fire. The line of a single company extended is too great for the eye and voice of the Captain to control, more especially when a wind is blowing and firing going on and the unity of action which is so essential between skirmishers, supports, and reserves, has to depend on the intelligence of two or three captains instead of on the judgment of one.

"If it be said that the system of skirmishing in double companies and the general supervision of a major counteract these defects, I reply—Firstly, that the supervision of a mounted officer ceases to be promptly effectual directly, the smoothness of a drill ground is exchanged for the ever-varying extent of broken woody or rolling country; and secondly, that men never work very well in double companies for they only hear words of command from others than *their own company officers*, and in extended formation it is of prime necessity that the men should recognize the voice that orders them. On a regimental parade ground men obey the command of *any* officer provided his voice be powerful, but during the excitement of a sham fight (and how much more during the actual engagement) unless the tone be recognized the order is apt to fall upon unheeding ears."

It appears to us that each section of a company skirmishing should be under command of a sergeant or non-commissioned officer, whose duty would be confined to placing his section in position, seeing the men did their duty, and carrying out the orders transmitted to him from the captain by signal or whistle, or whatever mode might be most advisable, allowing twenty-six files to a company (say fifty-two bayonets) and a space of three yards between each file, the distance from right to left of the line would be say 73 yards with the captain posted twenty yards in the rear of the centre, he would be within fifty yards of either extremity and could find no particular difficulty in communicating with any section of the line; the flank sections should be also under command of the ensign and lieutenant, both would be enabled to assist in carrying out the orders if in the rear of their respective commands. We cannot see any difficulty beyond the want of *apell* in the whole problem, and that want must be supplied by drill.