

Is the Swiss Citizen an Acceptable Soldier?

"The force and the value of an army depends on its officers. The Swiss officers are the best, physically and intellectually, that their people have to offer; they proceed on the principle: "Every profession is open to talent." And yet the Swiss officers do not form, in our Prussian sense, the first class of the nation. They would laugh in this republic if the uniform of an officer were to influence his civil professional status. Certainly he who carries the sword enjoys here certain advantages in the public and private view. But the militia officer plays a personal and gratuitous part clearly the greater in the defence and armament of his country. He makes sacrifices for it incomparably greater than the German officers either when on active service or not. The dignity of a commission is not only the result of successful endeavor on the part of a Swiss, an embellishment to his civil life; it is the mark of civic devotion to the State.

"The profound seriousness, the zeal with which the officers submit themselves to military duty has already borne splendid fruit. The German officer sees everywhere, with satisfaction, a conception of service prevailing which responds to his ideal. From this condition the influence exercised on the militia soldier. The subordinate cannot shirk with such an example. He is better led in this way to a proper soldierly spirit than by constraint and punishment. For two days during which I have lived with the soldier in the intimacy of his daily life, I was able to make the best kind of observations. I never saw a case where a superior spoke to his subordinate in other than a calm, reserved manner. Not once have I heard what is called the "barrack tone," and I saw nowhere the soldiers treated other than as citizens serving their country. What better school could one have?

"It is now some years ago since the French General Langlois, a zealous observer of the Swiss manoeuvres, admired the military institutions of the Confederation and did not exclude the officers from his praises. The exercises of this present year brought into the light, better than formerly, the initiative of the officer. On the march, even at the end of a long day, he does not relax his supervision of the pace, the department, the order and the cohesion of the troop. The young infantry lieutenant marches beside his section. His quiet observations, be it to praise or to blame, maintain constant good order. The captain of the company takes part, like a father, in the equitable distribution of rations. The officer commanding the battalion always finds time to think of how he can lessen fatigue. It is true that many orders are carried out more slowly, in a more hesitating manner, than with us. But there does not result, as in our case, a lot of bitterness and irritations which often poison an otherwise delightful manoeuvres. I have not seen, up to the present, a single Swiss officer enervated.

"The officers are young, on an average younger by ten years in the important commands, than with us, and physically of a vigour which would stand them in good stead in a campaign. For this reason they carry out