

Future of the English Volunteer Force.

From the "Army and Navy Gazette."

NOW that a committee has been assembled at the War Office to consider the future of the volunteer force, we trust that among the many points for reflection which the present state of that body presents, the all-important one of discipline will not be lightly passed over. Much as the volunteers have advanced in soldierly qualities during recent years, discipline, properly so called, cannot be said to exist among them. Commanding officers' orders are unfortunately nothing more than solicitations and appeals to the interest or enthusiasm of those under their command. It has become so much the custom to scoff at the volunteer colonel, and deny his claim to his rank, that the feeling which prevails in society permeates the ranks to a greater or less extent, with a result detrimental to discipline and all regimental good order. No matter how important the occasion, not a man can be compelled, in spite of his elaborate form of enlistment, to attend any parade except at his convenience. A uniform is supplied to each man - in the vast majority of cases at the public expense - and yet there is no power by which he can be obliged to wear it, if he has not the inclination to do so. From the annual inspection, even, his assertion that his business or his state of health prevents his attendance is considered by many commanding officers a sufficient excuse for absence. There are, in fact, many thousand volunteers who year after year get leave from the inspection, utterly disregard the orders which are sent to them at frequent intervals, and when the 1st week or two in October comes, have to be induced by coaxing and threats to scramble anyhow through the requisite number of drills and fire their class, so as to be returned as efficient. This achieved, they hand in their rifles and go their way, to be seen no more till a detached staff takes them in hand again the following October. But it is not only impossible for volunteer officers to compel attendance on parade: even when the uniform is donned, and a man appears in soldier's guise at drill, he is almost as much as ever his own master. No breach of discipline that he may commit, except in the rare cases of his being brigaded with the regular troops, is a military offence, or can be in any way specially punished as one. No matter how much a volunteer may disgrace his uniform by drunkenness and insubordination - even by personal violence to a superior officer in the discharge of military duty - the barren remedy lies only in the ordinary police court. Of course, in such a case the offender would be dismissed from his corps, and might be called upon to pay his capitation grant under his private agreement with his colonel. This latter penalty is, however, rarely enforced, for in most instances the regimental staff are only too anxious to hush any such matter up, and prevent its destroying the character and reputation of the regiment. As a matter of fact, the existing Volunteer Regulations were framed years ago, for a different class of men from those who now mainly compose our "citizen army." From being the plaything of the middle classes, volunteering has sunk deeply into the heart of the people, and the average private in our urban corps is a mechanic or workman of some kind. On him the rules of the service, which seem to be summed up in the Kindergarten threat, "If you are not good, you shall not play," have really very little, if any, hold. He joins either because he likes soldiering, because he wants to show himself off in uniform, or more frequently, perhaps, because some of his friends who are volunteers persuade him that it is a pleasant recreation. In many - indeed most - cases, he does his duty, and becomes a valuable adjunct to the military strength of his country. But if he does so, it is owing entirely to his own enthusiasm, and not in any way to the binding power of the contract he solemnly swears to fulfil. He may be, and frequently is, an utterly useless burden to the force, a hard bargain even at the low price the country pays for him - ill drilled, utterly undisciplined, and unable to shoot. And being all this, he may still nominally fulfil the terms of Government "efficiency." It is to this fact that we would call the notice of Lord Harris' committee, feeling sure that it will admit the necessity of important modifications in the terms of the present contract, if the volunteers are to become, as the majority of them earnestly desire to become, really reliable as a defensive force. The country has seen recently that there exists among the volunteers a comparatively large body of enthusiastic soldiers, whose efficiency is only limited by their opportunities; but no greater mistake could be made than to judge the whole of the 200,000 by those who attend at Aldershot and elsewhere for a course of practical military training. We strongly urge the advisability of drawing the reins of discipline much more tightly than hitherto. Special penalties ought to be attached to breaches of discipline and insubordination when under arms, whether at Aldershot or on the regimental parade. When a man puts on a military uniform he ought to be made to take upon himself military responsibilities, and to distinctly understand that as long as he wears a soldier's dress he ceases to be a civilian. It is our firm belief that such action on the part of the Government would be esteemed a compliment by the majority of the present

volunteers, who are fully aware that stringent rules are not made to intimidate the loyal majority, but to repress and keep in check the ill disposed, and that the greater the responsibility attaching to the performance of any duty the more honorable and important such duty becomes. No man is obliged to become a volunteer; but when he has joined the service, power ought to be given to commanding officers to compel the performance of work which, though undertaken voluntarily, ought to be, if necessary, rigidly fulfilled. On one point we entirely disagree with certain correspondents who lately addressed letters to the *Standard*. Some foolish people would seek to ignore and in every way lower volunteer rank. If the volunteer force is to exist as a military institution, and if the non-commissioned officers and men are to be made to obey orders willingly, something will have to be done in the direction, not of unmilitarising but militarising the commissioned ranks. It is in every way more essential that the officers of a force like the volunteers should have a recognised military status than even linesmen or militiamen, for we fail to see how discipline is to be properly maintained in such an organisation if Jack in the ranks, who has committed some serious offence, is encouraged to reason with himself, "I'm as good as he is; he's no officer, he's not." The linesman and militiaman are under restraint after their parades are over. The volunteer, when he is dismissed parade, goes his way. Could any army officer, after due reflection, advocate the inculcation of feelings of contempt for authority in an armed body, and in face of the fact that the man whose position is sought to be lowered is actually in possession of a commission signed by his Sovereign? It is simply a marvel to us how discipline has ever been maintained at all in the volunteer army, with the deep-rooted opinion existing in many quarters, openly given vent to in the public press, and read by non-commissioned officers and men in their offices and workshops, that a commission granted by the Sovereign to a volunteer officer is no commission at all, and that Col. Smith, Major Jones, and Captain Robinson are not colonel, major or captain at all, but only plain "misters" arrogating to themselves an authority which they have not. It is a state of affairs which cannot be tolerated any longer, if the volunteers are to be raised to a position which we firmly believe they would willingly assume - that of a reliable home reserve, not for use in case of invasion only, but to be embodied, under certain conditions, on an emergency, such as a European war. The one great requirement of the force is discipline, a discipline which will make every officer and man liable to certain pains and penalties if he fails to obey orders and render himself thoroughly effective. We hold that it would be better to have 100,000 men who could be implicitly relied upon than 200,000, such as we have at present, the majority of whom are, indeed, "civilian soldiers," and regard themselves as such, and who consider their officers only civilians too. Unfortunately, they are encouraged to do so by a few small-minded men who, forgetting the nation and its requirements, set aside all reason and common-sense, and would seek to convert what might be made a valuable institution into a veritable national menace.

Officer and Man.

IT is not to be denied that many an individual possessed of abilities of a kind that might be of the greatest use to him travels through life without utilising, and even without discovering, his powers. So, too, a very large proportion of officers go through their military career without utilising an immense power for good which, to a greater or less extent, they all have ready to their hand, viz. the exercise of a thorough moral ascendancy over their men. They appear to think that by dint of a steady continuance of drill they can count on implanting, in time, the best standard of discipline and smartness into those set under them. It is true that this system may produce an effect more or less satisfactory to the eye in time of peace: but with the rough usage of active service the veneer soon falls away, and exposes the rough unpolished surface of the inferior workmanship below. The main elements of success in battle are true discipline and thorough training on the part of the troops, and it should, therefore, be the aim of every officer, while times of peace yet afford the opportunity, to infuse these requirements into his men in the most effective way. In our service, as Lord Wolseley has very truly observed, we are apt to work in the reverse way to what a little reflection and common sense would show us to be the right way. The Archduke John, in his excellent lecture on this subject, given in Vienna some three years ago, pointed this out in the statement that one is very apt to work from outwards inwards instead of the reverse way. We should not endeavor to cure a lunatic by controlling his physical vagaries with a straight waistcoat, but by examining and treating the brain and nerves. If officers were generally to base their instruction on an appeal to the hearts and brains of their men, the desired results would be attained with a comparatively small expenditure of time, and built up on more lasting foundations. Excellence in details of parade is in our army insisted on