

CORRESPONDENCE.

VOLUNTEERS AND THE NEW ACT.

To the Editor of the VOLUNTEER REVIEW.

DEAR SIR:—The subject matter of several letters which have from time to time appeared in your columns from your correspondent "L. C." is of a nature so interesting to those who have at heart the progress and welfare of the Militia force of the Dominion, that I make no question its discussion has been as attentively followed by others as by myself. The reply to "F. O." by bringing forward another aspect of the question, imparts to its interest the additional stimulant of argument. I had, however, no intention of soliciting your permission to take any part in the discussion, but for an editorial remark in your issue of the 18th Oct., to which I feel constrained to demur. Of this presently. In the meantime I would crave your indulgence for a few remarks on the communications of both your gallant correspondents.

It may possibly be in your remembrance that I have never been forcibly impressed with admiration for Sir G. Cartier's Bill or for certain points in his mode of dealing with the Force. But prudence as well as a sense of the fair play due to an untried measure led me to refrain from committing myself to a rash condemnation until I had some opportunity of observing its working. I cannot at the present moment conscientiously say that I think worse (if so badly) of the measure as I did at first. But I believe that no one will be able to estimate with even approximate correctness, its effect on the Volunteer Force, until he shall be in possession of the musters for annual drill next year.

I am partly led to this conclusion from the fact that there is a large number of the force whose three years term is on the point of expiration, and I conceive it to be a matter of the gravest doubt, first, whether any great proportion of that number will renew their engagements, and secondly whether, in the event of their declining to do so, fresh Volunteers will, in the present temper of the Force and in the absence of inducements, step forth to fill their places.

In the face of such accounts as we have read of the turns out at Montreal, and in view of the extensive falling off of companies at the re-enrollment, it is impossible to doubt that there is a dissatisfaction existing in many quarters far greater than can be by any stretch of imagination, compatible with experience, be laid to the account of unhappily constituted and uninfluential officers. Yet I am inclined to believe that the manner in which the annual drill has been performed this year has tended slightly to restore the popularity which from more than one cause, received severe shocks in 1868.

But, on the other hand, I doubt if many Battalions have succeeded, notwithstanding the comparatively favorable conditions of

this year's drill, in bringing into the field as full a strength as they did last year, and, as I said before, it remains to be seen whether 1870, which will be a test-year for the system, will show an increase or a decrease.

However forcible, therefore, the strictures of "L. C." on the Militia Act, I cannot but think that a calmer consideration would have disposed that officer to regard it in the light of an experiment not as yet fully tested, and have deterred him from damaging his arguments by assertions of so extreme a nature as at once to challenge doubt as to the possibility of their correctness. It is one thing to believe, as many do, that the service is encumbered with a superfluity of staff, but it is quite another thing to fancy the officers of that staff capable of falsifying returns.

It might also perhaps be unwise to confer upon the "zealous officer" the power to draft at pleasure, unless that power were carefully circumscribed by guarantees against abuse. But in combatting this proposition of "L. C.'s" your gallant correspondent "F. O." brings us at once face to face with an assumption which lies near the root of the matter. I use the word 'assumption' not disrespectfully but because, although it might be unsafe to deny its correctness, I am not thoroughly convinced of its truth.

The fact assumed is that "the people will not be drafted." I am myself inclined to think that a draft so extremely moderate as would be required to complete the quota of companies whose ranks are already three parts filled with Volunteers, would cause little or no dissatisfaction, and I have grounds for my belief which, however, I will not prolong my communication by detailing them here,

I am bound to admit that the opinion of "F. O." is supported by some authority which should be good, as well as by some (to which I alluded many months ago in throwing together a "Few reasons for Volunteering,") which is unquestionably bad. Supposing it, however, to be absolutely right, it becomes matter of surprise that Sir George Cartier, having so intimate a knowledge as he is supposed to possess of the temper of the Canadian people, should have committed himself at all to the principle of drafting as set forth in clause 22 paragraph 2 of the Act, knowing that if 'the people will not be drafted,' the ballot must become a dead letter.

All will concede the propriety of regulating according to justice the alacrity which distinguishes Canadians in emergency, but, if the Regular Militia clause was, as "F. O." intimates, intended only to meet the extreme case of war, it should have been so specified. As it is there prevails a wide spread opinion that its original intent was equally to supply Volunteer deficiencies in time of peace.

At all events enthusiastic Volunteering when danger is at the door will not serve to

keep up an efficient nucleus in time of peace; should any District fail to produce the requisite numbers, and I think it may so fail from causes other than 'unfortunate accidents of position or temperament on the part of officers,' as I will presently try to show.

I have no desire, however, to endeavour to pick more holes in the Act, but before I come to certain points of "F. O.'s" letter in which I entirely concur, I would beg permission to notice one or two in which I do not.

I cannot agree with your gallant correspondent in attaching importance to Lord Elcho's approval of the Act, or that of any other Englishman without recent as well as long Canadian experience, or to that of any English journal. I doubt if the force be thoroughly understood by our own Parliament—our own government—our own staff. Its conditions as the actual army of the country, and in many other respects, are totally dissimilar to those of any force within English experience. Its workings are therefore little likely to be correctly understood or interpreted by English newspapers.

I am by no means so sure as is "F. O." that the fears which have been entertained of a falling away in the numerical strength of the Volunteers are groundless. As I said before I regard the act as yet on trial, and I do not think that any data will be obtained before the close of next year's drill which will form a reliable index.

The allusions of "F. O." to the Prussian system suggests a reference to an idea which appears to obtain in some quarters that we are here in Canada working out the problem of an armed nation vs. a national army. Perhaps we have begun to do so, but a very different temper to the apathy which prevades a large portion of our community must, if we are to rely solely on voluntary service, prevail, before our system will bear any comparison with that of Prussia. It is not probable that we shall ever support a standing army of any magnitude, consequently we must be if anything an armed nation. But we shall be but a wretched caricature of the thing we aim at so long as our armed nationality consists of no more than 40,000 Volunteers, trained and disciplined by a week's annual drill!

Now whatever may be the faults of the Hon. Bart. at the head of the Militia Department or of his Act, I perfectly agree both with your gallant correspondent and yourself, that not upon his shoulders should be laid the reproach of that ill directed economy which so effectually cripples the service in all its branches.

Let this opprobrium be ascribed where in the first place it is more immediately due to the ignorance and narrow mindedness of a certain class of members, which is unfortunately as "F. O." observes, sufficiently powerful to make itself felt. I am inclined to believe that had a Militia Bill been push-