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THE LESSONS OF THE DECADE.

BY A VOLUNTEER CAVALRYMAN.

(From the United States Army and Navy Journal.)

OFFICERS.

TAKEN from a grade of society no whit above the men, and in many cases illiterate as well as totally ignorant of military science, the first batch of officers sent out in our civil war were compelled to keep at a great distance from their men to preserve the semblance of discipline. Our system possessed only the faults of the English, without one of its counterbalancing excellences; and the consequence was that we were beaten out of our boots till we learned to follow the French system of promotion from the ranks.

In an aristocratic country, with well marked divisions of classes, the soldier, being a peasant, who can never be anything but a peasant, submits to ignorant officers, if taken from a class above him. The officer is an educated man, who belongs to a society whose ban on incapacity and cowardice is an effectual spur to advancement in his case. An English gentleman very soon becomes a good officer. But the case is very different in America. No such marked distinction of classes exist here, and lucky for us it is so. Our only aristocracy is that of intellect; that is to say, the only aristocracy that is universally recognized, everywhere and at all times. Wealth in families is transient, seldom lasting three generations. The great families of the Revolution have fallen, and small ones risen to greatness.

But intellect and education command respect almost unconsciously. The very tones of voice of an educated man strike the ear as different from those of a boor.

And in this it is that the merit of West Point as a school for officers lies. It takes them in rude boys, from any and every station. It turns them out educated gentlemen; and, as a consequence, the old Regular Army was always in excellent discipline. The men felt that a great gulf divided them from their officers, and the latter could afford to be kind to their men without fear of lax discipline.

But the system which answered for a small army, and which supplied that army with gentlemen for officers, broke down with a

million of men, until we began promoting from the ranks. Then we procured good officers, and not till then. Did we procure gentlemen? In many cases, yes. In some, no. Several of the first lot of sergeants raised to lieutenantcies turned out drunkards, and were dismissed the service within a year after. I use my own regiment to illustrate the point. It was an average representative regiment, and its history was repeated in that of many another of my acquaintances. But it was found that in most cases gentlemen had been hidden in the ranks; and I can remember several instances where the change of manners was surprising, from a first sergeant to an officers among officers.

The South followed our own system. But inasmuch as the institution of slavery had created in the South a privileged and highly cultivated order, their officers of volunteers were, as a class, superior to ours at the commencement of the war. They also promoted from the ranks, I believe, but without the same success as attended our experience. Their material was not so intelligent, and the aristocratic system suited them best.

What, then, would the lesson of the war seem to be on the officering of our cavalry of the future? Plainly, that with a people fairly educated as a mass, officers should be raised from the ranks. Intelligent men, I have often noticed, will follow such a one readily enough.

But how about the commencement of a war? Men cannot be raised from the ranks till they have shown their fitness for commissions.

The answer obviously seems to be to insure, by some means, the appointment of well-educated men for your first lot of officers. The answering of two or three questions of tactics should not be all the examination required of a would-be officer at the commencement of a war. Tactics are very soon learned, but they form but a very small part of an officer's duty. The largest part requires intelligence and extensive reading to supply the place of the experience that comes later. Men of intelligence and bravery, promoted from the ranks to associate with educated gentlemen, soon catch the tone of their manners and become a credit to the service.

But in this matter, as in many others, a good colonel is the father of his regiment. The influence of such a man is something wonderful. Good colonels make good regiments, and good captains make good companies. I am far from being convinced that a green regiment would not be infinitely better off in our service in war if it only had a colonel, an adju-

tant, and twelve good captains for the companies, leaving the junior commissions to be filled up by the colonel, after time enough had elapsed to show the best men.

Sergeants and corporals are amply sufficient to do all the guard duty. The commissary and quartermaster-sergeants already do all the work of their departments, and their principals just sign their names.

The hope of promotion would be a great incentive to green troops to observe discipline and to behave well in action, and the country would be spared the shameful abuses of the last war.

And in sending reinforcements to the field, Heaven grant that they may not be organized into fresh regiments, as they were at ruinous and suicidal cost, in 1864. Sent as recruits to fill up the gaps of veterans, such men pick up their duty in a very short time under the teachings of their comrades.

Formed into new regiments to swell the vanity of more of those insolent incapables who so foully disgraced their uniform, even to the last year of the war, such regiments indulged in stampedes that a member of the old corps would have blushed to be involved in.

At Five Forks I remember such a green regiment, six hundred strong, driven back in a disgraceful panic after less than five minutes' firing, with their colonel, a fellow called Middleton, at the head of the fugitives. An old regiment, depleted by the war to only forty-five carbines, was then advanced, and held the position till dark which the six hundred had vacated. But then their officers had risen from the ranks, and the men knew them; and the officers of the Twentieth Pennsylvania Cavalry were appointed from civil life, and the first to quit the fight.

In that single instance lies a volume of teaching on the selection of officers.

If you get old army officers among your captains, do so by all means. But if a man has not served, see to it that he has a good education; for as old as the Romans there is a proverb which says that "Learning softens the manners." And there is a good chance that a gentleman will do you credit not because he's braver than another, but because he daren't run away for fear of the people at home.

And above all, as the last piece of advice given us by the war, promote from the ranks.

DRUNKENNESS.

I am not a "total abstinence man"—far from it as can be; but still I hold that drunkenness is a vice so utterly degrading to a gentleman, which every officer ought to