

THE MILITIA OF NEW FRANCE.



THE organization of the French-Canadian militia, which so long gave infinite trouble to the populous and powerful New England colonies, was the subject of an exceedingly interesting lecture which Mr. Benjamin Sulte, of Ottawa, delivered at the Canadian Military Institute, Toronto, on the evening of Monday, Nov. 16. Deputy Surgeon-General Ryerson occupied the chair, and there was a good attendance. Mr. Sulte made it clear that from the time of the Marquis de Frontenac to the Seven Years' War, the wars of the French colony were carried on under a militia organization which in many ways suggests the Sedentary Militia, which

until 30 or 40 years ago was the organization in vogue in Canada under British rule, but which, owing to a few simple provisions, was far more effective than that of the later system.

Mr. Sulte began by sketching the feudal system of the seigneuries, which sprang up on the withdrawal by the king of the power of government from the trading companies. When the Marquis de Frontenac arrived in Canada in 1672, he found in a fair process of development a system whereby 25 or 30 individuals, cadets of good houses of France, had large estates for which they were supposed to find settlers; and, as a matter of fact, a few years previously there had been an immigration of a number of settlers of a genuinely agricultural class, nearly all being hard working Normans. The regular troops had departed, and in 1674 Frontenac made the seignorial system the basis of a system of local defence. In each parish, large or small, a captain was appointed, his duty being to see that the men of the parish able to bear arms were assembled from time to time for military exercises, more especially for shooting, for it was intended mainly to utilize these men as skirmishers or piquets, to meet the requirements of Indian warfare, as it could not be expected that masses of men large enough to be styled armies would be used against either the Iroquois or the British establishments in proximity to the borders, the two possible foes of the infant colony. In this manner Frontenac secured an efficient and very cheap militia force.

At no time were the men of the parish all called out for military service. When, after ten or twelve years of peace, war broke out in 1684, and again in 1686, to continue with few interruptions for nearly thirty years, the expeditions against the Iroquois and the English colonies were undertaken by bodies of volunteers taken from the ranks of these parish companies; a body of 100 men—their strength was seldom greater than this—would probably contain elements from five or six neighboring seigneuries. There was no levy en masse until the Seven Years' War. These expeditions were generally under the command of seigneurs, who, as a class, gave an exceedingly good account of themselves during the struggle. Mr. Sulte disproved the assertion that the leaders who guided the French in their numerous wars were regular officers brought out from France; the careers of these men, he said, are known, and they were all Canadians, trained in Canada. Some Canadians, he observed, went into the regular army in France—and took care to stay in France. The seigneurs had the supervision over the captains, who were generally well-to-do habitants, combining with their military rank the duties of bailiff and some municipal functions; in fact, their position was a good deal similar to that held by some local officers in the Channel Islands at the present time.

The main features of the wars with the Iroquois and the New England colonies were then sketched by Mr. Sulte, who pointed out how they were fostered by the fur traders, who found supporters

in the military tastes of the seigneurs, who were frequently interested in the fur trade, and in the adventurous disposition of the people. The colony itself suffered on the whole very little in the struggles, screened as it was by an impenetrable frontier. During all these years the wars were almost altogether carried on by the light troops trained under this system and officered by Canadian seigneurs acquainted with the methods of fighting needed in the bush. The only semblance of regular troops kept up in the country were the detachments maintained in Quebec, Three Rivers, Sorel, Montreal, Chambly and St. John's. These posts were commanded by members of the seignorial class. These detachments were paid by the Minister of Colonies in France—in accordance with the centralizing system, the evils of which Mr. Sulte forcibly exposed—and amounted in all to about 150 men. Most of these men were old soldiers who enlisted for service in Canada on the understanding that after three or four years they might return to France or take up land; sometimes men were recruited in the colony. The yearly draft was about 25, and the entire force, which really amounted to little more than a guard for the magazines and stores, was under the command of a captain.

In such a country the question of transport would naturally be of great importance and it was the one which was least satisfactorily met. The chief expedient resorted to was the corvee, or

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