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CONTENTS OF THIS NUMBER.

TOPICS OF THE WEEK.

New rules for the D.A.A.
The military pension scheme.
How to prevent desertion.

BRITAIN'S RIFLES.

Trouble over the new arm.

DOMINION ARTILLERY ASSOCIATION.

Proposed amendments to the constitution.

NEW SIGHTING APPLIANCES.

The invention of Robt. Gaskin of St. John
N.B.

CORRESPONDENCE.

Encouragement for young shots.—*Old School.*

THE CANADIAN MILITARY RIFLE LEAGUE.—
W. S. Duncan.

THE RIFLE.

C Battery and the League.

REGIMENTAL AND OTHER NEWS.

FANCY AND TRICK RIFLE SHOOTING.—*Shooting
and Fishing.*

Topics of the Week.

The attention of our readers, especially those who belong to the artillery branch, is called to the proposed new constitution for the Dominion Artillery Association, which Mr. L. Homfray Irving has given notice of his intention to move. Mr. Irving, who is secretary of the Ontario Association, is well known as an enthusiast in artillery matters, and in framing the new constitution he has aimed at encouraging the formation of provincial associations, and the bringing into the association of the many artillery officers now unfortunately conspicuous only by their absence.

The *Halifax Critic* thus endorses the proposed pension scheme: "We are glad to be informed, on what appears to be good authority, that it is at last contemplated to bring forward in the ensuing session of Parliament, a measure for pensioning staff officers of militia, when obliged to retire after many years' service, at a rate of some degree of equality with civil servants of the people. That an officer who has devoted 25 or 30 years of the prime of his life to a service which has in the past been by no means encouraging, should be turned adrift, when he attains the age at which retirement becomes a necessity, with a beggarly three years pay of his rank, is a thorough discredit to any country, and we shall rejoice if the information we have of intended reform is found to be correct.

General D. S. Stanley, U. S. A., in his recent annual report on the Department of Texas, has some interesting suggestions relative to the prevention of desertion. Recognizing that the entire cure is an impossibility, he suggests, as likely to abate the evil: first, make the eligible age of the recruit twenty-four years; secondly, give each recruit six months probation before administering to him the oath, giving half-pay and carrying the balance to the end of his third year; and, thirdly, prohibiting all officers from using a soldier for any menial service in any way or manner. As his reasons for these suggestions, General Stanley says: "Young recruits are especially prone to desert, but after a young man has reached twenty-four years of age his mind is better settled upon the realities of labour and of life. As to the second proposition, a very large proportion of desertions occur in the first six months of enlistment, simply because the recruit finds himself unsuited for the army; and, thirdly, employing men even as grooms or helpers outside of the house raises a spirit of envy and discontent in a troop, battery or company. These recommendations," says the General, "may not be worth more than hundreds that have preceded them, but it would cost nothing to try them as compared to the pecuniary losses consequent upon desertion."

Britain's Rifles.

Although our militia is still armed with the old Snider, and many of the barrels are undoubtedly worn out and useless, we are perhaps happier than if striving after the most modern weapon. Nothing can illustrate the troublesome effects of a change better than the state of affairs in England at the present time.

The Snider is, after all, a good old reliable solid weapon, carrying a heavy bullet, which effectually checks an enemy wherever it strikes him. The parts are strongly made and not likely to get broken or damaged much, as is shown by the comparatively few damaged by the rough usage they received in the campaign of 1885. The Martini is better still. All its parts are shut up in a metal box, and cannot be got at to injure. Experience has shown that the percentage of Martinis injured upon actual service is even less than the percentage of Sniders, owing to the above-mentioned fact. Of course there was a loud outcry about its "jamming" from the dust and sand of the desert in the Soudan, but this has been conclusively proved, beyond all contradiction, to have been entirely caused by the faulty Boxer cartridge, a cartridge anathematised as having been "conceived and brought forth by the perpetration of one of the most glaring frauds that has ever darkened the annals of the War Office records."

Conclusive tests and trials with almost unimaginable severity of sand and dust upon the Martini action at Enfield have shown that the Martini will never jamb with the solid case ammunition, and for the last few years large supplies of this have been turned out at Woolwich, ready for any active service calls.

As for its shooting powers we have now the proof before us. We have heard the shooting of the new .303 Metford barrel lauded to the skies. Whatever might be said about the unsatisfactory state of the new Enfield-Lee action, we were told that the barrel was all right. Now, what are the real facts? Quite lately at the School of Musketry, Hythe, two teams of crack shots were selected to fire a match—the one with Martini-Henry's and the other with the Enfield-Lee Metford. In the first match the Martini-Henry men "wiped out" the men using the new rifle, and, of course, the cry went up from the spectators that "it was an arranged matter, the teams were unevenly selected, the staff of the School of Musketry were known to be ready to do anything to injure the new rifle, for had they not unanimously reported condemning it after its trials last year, and had not the Secretary of State for War been obliged to suppress their report and refuse, when asked in the House of Commons, to let it be seen," etc. But lo and behold, the teams then exchanged weapons, and with exactly the same result. The Martini again scored a victory over the new rifle, the former winning team being hopelessly beaten when shooting with the new rifle.

Practical men are reported to have said that the new rifle is nothing but a pretty toy, and that the committee who have obtained its adoption must be singularly prejudiced to be blind to the defects of a toy with which they have played so long and which they have built up themselves. Whatever truth there may be in this sweeping assertion, it is undoubtedly the fact that the new rifle has not been made perfect.