

Reminiscences of a Volunteer Officer.

BY A. W. H. L.

IT is hard for volunteers of to-day to realise the difficulties which their brothers in arms had to surmount in former years. For the present generation I have transferred to paper the following incidents of a volunteer's life:—

In 1859, the whole of England was thrown into a state of ferment by rumors of a French invasion. This confusion was the outcome of the bombastic effusions of certain French colonels. The response to this call to arms was immediate; meetings were held in all parts of the country, and, at some towns, dummy guns were served out to the men, who were too impatient to wait for more deadly weapons, the use of which the Government had not yet sanctioned. We were situated in the centre of a large manufacturing district, and the wave of patriotic enthusiasm burst upon us with its full force. When it was finally decided that a corps must be formed, the choice of uniform was a matter for violent discussion. Our little doctor thought uniform everything, and wished us to adopt one similar to that worn by the line, but with marvellous variations, which would increase its brilliancy. The drum-major was a great source of anxiety. In appearance he would have been something between a field marshal and an African potentate, if the doctor had carried the day—a large bearskin cap with a scarlet feather, and a staff which might have served the aforesaid king as a royal sceptre, were to be the principal items. After the preparation of most careful working drawings, and after much labor, both mental and physical, the designs were presented to our chief for approval. Then all the doctor's most sanguine hopes of glory were dashed to the ground. The major chose habiliments which, though serviceable to a degree, were nearly the cause of our worthy medico's resignation—slate grey, with green facings, just fancy it. The doctor made a very unkind cynical remark when he first met me afterwards; he said he had just passed a funeral looking much more cheerful than I did. But our major was rewarded for his quiet taste, for during the levee of volunteer officers in London, an old general, covered with decorations, came up to him, and said, "Allow me to say, sir, that your uniform is by far the most perfect in the room, even to the gloves."

Our greatest rivals were the volunteers at the neighboring town of—. Not a little confusion was caused there, as a commanding officer could not be found who would please everybody. This difficulty was solved by the formation of six distinct regiments of one company each, with different uniforms, bands, and commanders. The Government was very kind in those days; there were no such things as volunteer

brigades. It was even said by some envious person that at their first meeting the chairman delivered a stirring address, at the conclusion of which he requested "all those who wished to be elected officers to leave the room." All left except three, and they elected themselves.

Our first parade was quite a success, though as our officers had not yet mastered the *red book* (who ever did?) the sergeant-instructor played rather an important part. Never shall I forget the look of outraged majesty on the face of our adjutant, Captain O'Regan, as fine an officer as ever stepped (he weighed twenty stone), when he saw with a glance of the eye down the line that one man's tunic was distinctly an inch longer than that of any other member of our distinguished corps. It took some time for the men to shake down to the unaccustomed restraint of discipline, and woe to the man who was unfortunate enough to rub his nose on parade. The adjutant was down on him like a "Daniel Lambert. What the— that man doing?" "Why, sir, if a wasp stings your nose you mustn't raise your hand." A member said afterwards he wished a wasp would settle on the adjutant's nose, and then perhaps he would give the order "Prepare to receive wasps."

We officers were in high feather when the chief presented us with our swords, and many were the surmises as to whether they were proof weapons, or had only been made for the volunteers. I remember one day Lieutenant Norton coming on parade with his sword notched in half a dozen places, like that of a Paladin of old; afterwards I said to him, "Why, Norton, you don't mean to say the French have actually been over during the night, and taken their licking; your sword looks as if you were going to pass it on to the pioneers for a saw back." "Oh, it's all right, old fellow," said he, "but Captain Jones and I have been cutting and guarding to see if the metal is good, and you see it has held."

Having passed through the rudiments of drill, and reached the mysteries of the bayonet exercise, much strength of mind was necessary to survive the instructions of our sergeant. Having his squad drawn up in line, and facing them with his rifle and bayonet, he would deliver a vicious point to within an inch of your waistbelt, and then impress his instructions upon you with the following words, "When you've got yer bayonet firmly fixed in the bowels of yer adversary, give it a twist to the left, and it will render the wound incurable." A man who could pass through this trying ordeal without a cold shiver running down his spine was a hero indeed.

Then, too, there way the musketry instruction, and here our sergeant was in his element. He had his little joke when teaching us recruits to clean our rifles. Of course, we used the old Enfield muzzle-loader, and to remove the fouling it was necessary to fill the barrel with water, and allow it to run

out by the nipple. "Now then, Bill Stokes," Sergeant Blank would say, "you've got yer water all ready, and what would you pour it in with?" "Oh," said Bill Stokes, "a tin can." "Bedad thin sargent," says private O'Grady, "I'd use me ould tay-pot." Some say one thing, and some say another, but we are all wrong. Then Sergeant Blank has his turn. "Why," he says, "you must pour it in with care."

Talking of cleaning arms reminds me of a tale told the other day by a colonial volunteer. The members of his corps had grown tired of the good old Snider, and had ordered out a consignment of beautiful new Martini's fresh from a Government factory. The new weapons were to the colonel as the apple of his eye and every care was to be bestowed upon them. The recruits, knowing nothing of recoil, were frantic to try them. There was one young fellow who was filled with a noble unselfish love of duty; he was the model private, and everybody said he was too good for this world.

On the day after the new rifles had been served out, he came to the sergeant-major, and explained, with tears in his eyes, how he had sat up all night, after a hard day's work, struggling with his new weapon, but although he had used everything he could think of, he could not get quite all the rust off the barrel, and would the sergeant-major lend him a file. Tradition hath it that when the interview was concluded, it was seen that the youth's hair had turned white in a single hour. He had never heard of browning a barrel.

Our adjutant always impressed upon us the great importance of musketry efficiency, and he certainly handled a rifle well himself. His feelings were dreadfully hurt some time after he joined our battalion, by an order promulgated from the Horse Guards, to the effect that all volunteer adjutants were to go through a course of musketry at Hythe, and take certain certificates. Now Captain O'Regan had served with distinction in the Crimea, and raged and fumed over this piece of red tapeism, which compelled such a seasoned officer as himself to go back to rudimentary drills. The instructor at Hythe was explaining some abstruse problem in trajectory. "Now you see," said he, "the ball will strike the target three feet from the centre if your rifle barrel deviates from the straight an eighth of an inch." "The eighth of an inch," said O'Regan, "what do I care about the eighth of an inch. Do you take me for a d—d tailor?" However, his troubles were not yet over. He was as proud of his spurs as a fighting cock, and on the order to fall in for preliminary practice, among others up swaggered our unfortunate friend. "Captain O'Regan, sir," said the instructor, "you got spurs on, sir," "Yes, I am an adjutant," replied O'Regan ignoring the friendly hint. "Very good, sir," then proceeding, "As a front rank standing, prepare to load, load—rod—home—return—cap. As a front rank at 300 yards, ready—