

MILITARY INSTRUCTION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES.

AN OPEN LETTER BY EX-PRESIDENT HARRISON.



RESOLUTIONS were adopted on August 4, 1893, by Lafayette Post (New York) of the Grand Army of the Republic, in which ground was taken in favor of military instruction in public and private schools. A committee consisting of Messrs. E. L. Zalinski, Floyd Clarkson, and Joseph J. Little suggested that resolutions be submitted to the Twenty-seventh Annual Encampment of the Grand Army in behalf of the Post. This was done, and these resolutions were adopted by the Grand Army as follows:

WHEREAS, The policy of the United States in maintaining a small standing army leaves the defense of the country in time of war to rest upon hasty levies of volunteers; and

WHEREAS, The rapidity with which wars progress in modern times has reduced the time available for the instruction of such levies to a very brief period; and

WHEREAS, The Grand Army of the Republic recognizes the importance of making adequate provision for the formation of an effective force which will, after its members have passed away, fill the places which they once occupied in the ranks of the defenders of our country; and

WHEREAS, This force, under the peculiar institutions of this country, can best be obtained by giving to the youths at school a preliminary military training which they will carry through life, and which will be of substantial benefit to them, physically and mentally, in the pursuits of peace; and it is therefore desirable that all American youths should receive military instruction at the earliest practicable age; and

WHEREAS, The Grand Army of the Republic has been foremost in the patriotic work of inculcating a spirit of loyalty and devotion to our flag and country; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the members of the Grand Army of the Republic cordially indorse the language of Comrade Benjamin Harrison, addressed to the National Association of Teachers, that "the strength and defense of our institutions, not only in peace but in war, is to be found in the young of the land who have received from the lips of patriotic teachers the story of the sacrifice which our fathers made to establish our civil institutions, and which their sons have repeated on hundreds of battle-fields. The organized army of the United States, even if we include the militia of the States, is of insignificant proportions when put in contrast with the armies of the other great powers of the world. Our strength is not in these: it is in the great reserve to be found in the instructed young of our land, who come to its defense in time of peril."

RESOLVED, That this Twenty-seventh Annual National Encampment is of the opinion that the Grand Army of the Republic takes a deep interest in all efforts to provide for the future defense of the country, and that it recommends an organized effort to impress upon the various Municipal, State, and National authorities the advisability of the adoption of a system by which scholars attending the public and private schools, as well as the high schools and colleges, shall receive instruction in military matters, and to impress upon the rising generation of the country the fact that, as American citizens, it is their duty to bring to the defense of their country, in its need, the education which they may have received in this particular in their youthful days.

RESOLVED, That it is the recommendation of this National Encampment that the Department Commanders give especial attention to the accomplishment of this object through a staff officer, and that the Posts in the various cities, towns, and villages, by committees, public meetings, and other means, give their earnest coöperation and support in securing necessary legislative, municipal, and school-board action, as well as to obtain, where required, national aid by provision of arms, equipments, and instructors.

On account of the above reference to ex-President Harrison, the Editor of THE CENTURY communicated with Mr. Harrison, and asked him whether he had anything to say further, publicly, as to the expediency of the proposed plan; and in reply the following communication has been received for publication:



YOU ask my opinion of the suggestion of Lafayette Post, G. A. R., of New York city, that military instruction and drill be used in all schools for boys. It is good in every aspect of it—good for the boys, good for the schools, and good for the country. A free, erect, graceful carriage of the body is an acquisition and a delight. It has a value in commerce, as well as in war. Arms and legs are distressing appendages to a boy under observation, until he has been taught the use of them in repose. The chin is too neighborly with the chest, and the eyes find the floor too soon; they need to have the fifteen paces marked off. The sluggish need to be quickened, and the quick taught to stand, the wilful to have no will, and all to observe fast. The disputatious need to learn that there are conditions where debate is inadmissible; the power and beauty there is in a company—moved by one man and as one man. Athletic sports have their due, perhaps undue, attention in most of the colleges and high schools; but in the graded schools, within my observation, exercise is casual and undirected. None of these exercises or sports is, however, a substitute for military drill; and some of them create a new need for it. A good oarsman need not be erect or graceful; a good arm and plenty of wind meet his needs. The champion "cyclist" is not apt to have square shoulders. The foot-ball captain is so padded that a safe judgment can hardly be formed as to his natural "lines"; but a good leg and momentum seem to me—a non-expert—to be his distinctive marks. In base-ball the pitcher seems, to an occasional observer, to have parted with all his natural grace to endow the curved ball.

A military drill develops the whole man, head, chest, arms, and legs, proportionately; and so promotes symmetry, and corrects the excesses of other forms of exercise. It teaches quickness of eye and ear, hand and foot; qualifies men to step and act in unison; teaches subordination; and, best of all, qualifies a man to serve his country. The flag now generally floats above the school-house; and what more appropriate than that the boys should be instructed in the defense of it? It will not lower

their grade-marks in their book recitations, I am sure. If rightly used, it will wake them up, make them more healthy, develop their pride, and promote school order. In the Centennial parades in New York, in April, 1889, the best marching I saw was that of some of your school children. The alignment of the company front was better than that of the regulars or of the Seventh Regiment.

If all the school-boys of the North had, from 1830 on, been instructed in the schools of the soldier and of the company, and in the manual of arms, how much precious time would have been saved in organizing the Union army in 1861. We were in a very low state, as a people, in military knowledge and training when the great civil war broke out. Volunteers in plenty, but few soldiers. I very well remember how hard it was for me to learn which was the right of the company, and to understand why it continued to be the right when the right about had made it the left; and how we had, in 1862, to send to a distant city to find a drill-master competent to instruct the company officers, not one of whom could go through the manual of arms; and how the regiment, after a few half-learned lessons in the company drill, was sent to the seat of war with guns which they had never loaded or fired. Fortunately, the men had the American adaptability and quickness, and our adversary only a little better preparation. It will not be safe to allow war to come upon us again in that state, for war's pace has greatly quickened, and the arms of precision now in use call for a trained soldier. Under our system we will never have a large standing army, and our strength and safety are in a general dissemination of military knowledge and training among the people. What the man and citizen ought to know in order to the full discharge of his duty to his country should be imparted to the boy. Nothing will so much aid to enlarge our State militia, and to give it efficiency and character, as the plan proposed. The military taste and training acquired in the school will carry our best young men into the militia organizations, and make those organizations reliable conservators of public order, and ready and competent defenders of the national honor.

Benjamin Harrison.

November 3, 1893.

