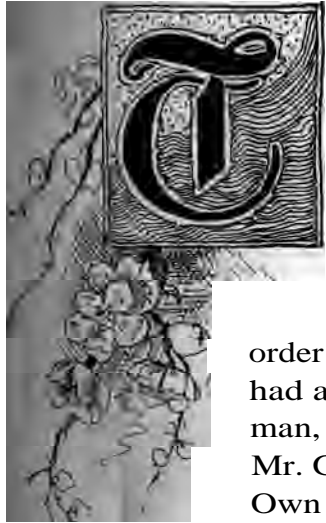


# CHAPTER VII

## THE THIRTEENTH BATTALION BAND



THE patriotic fund committee, on October 6th, 1866, presented the commanding officer the sum of \$1,000. and a committee, consisting of Lieut.-Colonel Skinner, Captain Watson, Captain Askin and Lieut. Ritchie, was appointed to take the necessary steps towards organizing a band, such being the disposition which the patriotic fund committee desired to be made of the money. A band was immediately organized and in good working order in a few weeks, and since that time the battalion has always had an efficient band. The first bandmaster was Mr. P. Grossman, who held the position till 1869, when he was succeeded by Mr. George Robinson (late of the band of H. M. Prince Consort's Own Regiment). After one year's service Mr. Robinson retired. Mr. Wm. Blanchard then assumed the leadership, but the position again became vacant, owing to his decease, on January 17th, 1871. Mr. Robinson was then induced to assume his former position as bandmaster, in which capacity he has officiated until the present time. In October of 1873, the instruments becoming worn out, it was decided to replace them, and steps were taken for the purchase of a new set of Besson's manufacture, valued at \$1,800. The money for the purchase of these instruments was raised by subscription among the officers and men of the battalion, and in March, 1874, the new instruments were placed in the hands of the bandsmen.

Inasmuch as the battalion itself was organized only four years before 1866, the history of the band dates almost identically with the history of the battalion, and November 1st, of this year, bringing to a close the 30 years of George Robinson's labors as bandmaster, the present is an opportune time in which to review briefly the history of the band and its leader.

Before this is done, however, it must not be forgotten that previous to 1866 there were bands in the city—bands with mercurial memberships and an uncertain hold upon existence. Perhaps the first one of these that merits rec-

ognition was the organization known as the Temperance band, brought together in 1851, under the leadership of Peter Grossman. It was the outcome of the great wave of temperance which swept over the country at that time, and was run under the auspices of the temperance societies of the city. When the cold water wave of sentiment receded, this band became disorganized, and a new company of players was formed in 1853, under the name of the City band, Mr. Grossman still being its conductor.

About this time Colonel Booker (afterwards Lieut.-Colonel of the Thirteenth Battalion) was much interested and very enthusiastic in military matters,



THE THIRTEENTH BATTALION BAND

and had an independent artillery corps under his control, their guns having been cast for them in the Great Western car shops, which were then located in Hamilton. The Colonel was as enthusiastic about music as he was about military matters, and through his efforts the old City band became merged into the Hamilton Independent Artillery band. This happened in 1856, and, under this name, Mr. Grossman kept his players together until 1862, when, as is nearly always the case, a re-action set in, and for nearly four years the genealogical line of our present well-known band was almost lost. But not altogether, for enough of the old artillery players were around to form the nucleus of a new organization,

and that new organization was our own Thirteenth Battalion Band, it being recognized for the first time as a band of the regiment on Nov. 12, 1866, with Mr. Grossman at its head.

It was in 1862, at the time of the Trent trouble, that George Robinson came to Canada and Hamilton with the Rifle Brigade. Although he stayed in the Rifle Brigade for four years, being stationed at Kingston, Montreal and Quebec, he could not forget Hamilton. So much did he think of her and her prospects that he secured his discharge from the Rifles, and in 1866 came back to the city of his choice, little dreaming at the time that he would here be leader of the crack band of the Dominion for a period of thirty years.

At the time Mr. Robinson took charge of the band the state of music- in Canada, and in fact, all over America, was not very encouraging. There were good bands and good bandmasters of the old schools, but methods and instruments were of necessity primitive, and the standard of musical composition in use was low. The appearance in Canada of the British military bands did much to cause an improvement in this country, and across the line the day of real advancement may be said to have dawned at the time of the Boston Jubilee festival. George Robinson was not behind in grasping all improvements within reach, and, so far as lay within the often limited means of the band, new instruments were purchased, and a better class of music taken up. The old German instruments of other days were laid away, and Besson's English, make substituted. New instruments have made their appearance, and, whenever possible, these were added. Among these are the bass and tenor clarionettes, the oboe, the double bass and slide trombone, the bassoon, French horns, saxaphones and tympani, these latter being among the last added.

Because advantage was taken of these improvements in instruments, and because at all times better things were sought for in the way of compositions, the Band of the Thirteenth Battalion grew in favor, and its fame as A. first-class musical organization spread throughout the country. It was not only in and around Hamilton that the bandsmen's services were demanded by the people, but in other Canadian cities also. In Toronto in 1874, at Montreal in 1878 and at Ingersoll in 1879 there were band competitions in which the Hamilton band took part, and under George Robinson's leadership creditably acquitted itself in competition with the best military bands of the country. When the Peace Jubilee was held at Berlin in 1871 the band was there, the big attraction of that immense gathering. At Montreal with the Royal Templars ; in Toronto more times than can be easily told; at Sarnia to enliven the proceedings of the great tunnel opening, and in many other Canadian towns has the band played.

In the United States the band's greatest conquests have been made in company with the members of St. Bernard Commandery, Knights Templar, of

Chicago. With this commandery, trips have been made to Chicago, St. Louis, Boston, Denver and Washington, the Canadians on every occasion being royally treated and unstintingly praised by both press and people. The St. Bernard \_ Commandery in 1891 made a visit to Hamilton and to the Thirteenth Battalion Band.

At St. Louis the band and its leader were honored in a marked manner by the late P. S. Gilmore, who was in charge of the musical festivities. That gentleman, with his wide knowledge of bands and band music, selected the Canadian organization, from among the many there, to play a separate selection, a thing done by only one other band, and that one Gilmore's own.

At Washington also an incident occurred that was not only unique, but interesting, and called forth most kindly expressions from the American press. The bandsmen, together, visited the tomb of the great Washington, at Mount Vernon, and there, with the Union Jack draped over the bass drum, played a funeral dirge to the memory of that great man.

During its Denver trip, in 1892, the band went up Pike's Peak, where they played " God Save the Queen." While in Denver the band gave a complimentary concert to the Canadian Maple Leaf Club of Denver. A number of national airs were played, and the large audience was most enthusiastic.

In Chicago the band is well established in the favor of the people, for every time the commandery trips have been taken in past years there have been grand local concerts arranged for, and thousands of Chicago residents have sat, listened to and appreciated the concert numbers of the famous Hamilton organization. The Band accompanied the St. Bernard Commandery to Boston on its visit to that city in 1895. In the parade there were 22,000 Knights and 164 bands, but the Thirteenth Band, as usual, received its full measure of approbation from the spectators.

At various times the band has been engaged by the Grand Trunk Railway to assist at the opening of their different lines. Among other events of this character they were at the openings of the St. Clair Tunnel at Sarnia in 1890 and the new Suspension Bridge over the Niagara River in 1897.

On the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of Bandmaster Robinson's leadership of the band, November 2nd, 1898, a complimentary benefit concert was tendered him, and an audience of over 2,000 people crowded the Drill Hall. During the evening a gold watch, suitably inscribed with the crest of the corps, was presented to him, a gift from the officers of the corps. The presentation was made by Mrs. McLaren.

