

REFORMS FOR THE MILITIA

By C. A. CARROL

RECENT legislation has been enacted by our Government that will alter materially the method of managing our militia. The contemporary sensation produced by the dismissal of the late commanding officer has revived largely the public interest in matters pertaining to the militia. If aught to the good of the whole organization will accrue, it would be well that such sensations were often repeated. The Canadian militia is a body well worthy of the public interest, for it represents a vital agency for our immediate public safety. It is of paramount importance that the whole force may always be so equipped and disciplined as to render effective service in a national emergency. The action of Lord Dundonald in making a public attack upon his employers may be viewed as questionable in many quarters. Nevertheless though advantage may be sought by the Canadian Opposition through this, the charges made against the militia management and the revelation of deplorable truths are clearly to the best interests of the Canadian public.

The unfortunate circumstances connected with the retirement of Lord Dundonald are now too well known to the public for extended comment. Let it suffice to say that the present Government, deeply censurable as it may appear in the present instance, ought not to be shouldered with all the blame. It was, upon taking office, limited entirely to the precepts of a pre-existing system. The Liberal Government has ample precedents for the course it has recently pursued. The Opposition ought not to talk too loudly upon political issues in the militia, for Liberals have reason to remember a Conservative bureaucracy in what they claim should have been a non-political force. The Liberal Government has merely, in imitating a former course, pushed matters to the point of exposure. It remained for

a high-minded soldier, when given a plain opportunity by a badly advised Government action—his curt dismissal—to publish abroad complete details of the prevailing system. While technically insubordinate in the first instance, the country may ever feel grateful for the spirit of his service.

The Canadian militia has been largely in the public eye since the commencement of the British-Boer War. The volunteers from Canada who served through the long campaign have won for Canada a world-wide renown. The era of the citizen-soldier has really begun, and the citizen soldiery of Canada, imperfect as their equipment and organization has been shown to be, stand high among the nations of the world. The mere fact that they have co-operated in the defence of the Empire is a significant factor for future remembrance. During their recent war experience they have shown qualities in advance of the regular forces, especially in mobility and initiative. Therefore the whole force from which these chosen men were drawn ought to be of real interest to every patriotic Canadian. But such is far from the case. Except for the enthusiasm during a national war, or in some political issue, very little real interest is ever shown in the militia, except to vilify the rank and file, and to discourage rather than aid the efficiency of the various corps.

The Canadian militia—it is a lamentable fact to state—has always been a football for the politicians. All the orators of both parties take a whack at it, and the mountains of vapory patriotism during the campaign tour changes to slang-whanging when the period of action arrives. Every vital issue is avoided. The Defence Fund of the country is pared down to the lowest point in order to provide for a prodigal expenditure in some other quarter in which a graft is more easily manipulated. That both