

CHAPTER III.

THE CAVALRY OF 1812-1814.

This was in the time of battles,
Battles for the native land;
Whatever was in safe keeping,
Was held by the strong right hand.
—N. McDUGALL.



JUST as the period of the War of 1812-1815 was the heroic age of Canada, so it was certainly the most vital epoch in the history of the Canadian militia. The supreme test of war proved the practical value of the militia as a defensive force; revealed certain defects but more points of strength in the system; and clearly demonstrated that so long as Canadians are determined to preserve their independence of the republic to the south of them, they can do so. The war did something more.

It showed that the Canadian people inherited high soldierly qualities from their warlike ancestry, and it firmly established a strong patriotic, military spirit in Canada, which can never die out so long as the story of Detroit, Queenston Heights, Lundy's Lane, Chrysler's Farm and Chateaugay is told in history.

It was to the fervent military spirit begotten of Canada's victorious fight for independence against such terrific odds, and to the country's necessities disclosed during the long campaign, that the Governor-General's Body Guard owed its existence. A history of that corps consequently calls for some reference to the events of those stirring years. At the opening of the war the population of Canada was but 425,000 souls, of whom but 77,000 lived in Upper Canada. The population of the United States was about 6,000,000.

There were only 4,450 regular troops in Canada. These included the 8th, 41st, and 100th Regiments of the line, some detachments of the Royal Artillery, the 10th Royal Veterans' Regiment, the Newfoundland Fencibles, and the Glengarry Fencibles. Of these there were only 1,500 men above Montreal.

The United States Congress passed the bill empowering the President to declare war against Great Britain, June 18th, 1812.

The time appeared propitious for an attack on the stronghold of British principles in America, the home of the United Empire Loyalists and their descendants. With the exception of Russia, the whole continent of Europe lay prostrate at the feet of its conqueror, Napoleon Bonaparte. His power was at its zenith. He had the resources of all the conquered powers at his command. He appeared invincible, and his hatred of England, the one consistent and unconquerable obstacle to his complete triumph, was fiercer than it had ever been. Britain stood committed to the Peninsular War, where the sight and the deeds of the redecoats were to work a resur-