

The Canadian Militia

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THE year 1905 is memorable in Canada for it was then that the last of the British Tommies marched aboard the men-o'-war at Halifax and Esquimalt. Canada was full grown. From thenceforth she was absolute mistress in her own house.

But, however much confidence the British Tommy has inspired in the last century, and however much he may have done for Canada in the dark days of 1812 and 1813, the hardy citizens of the new land have never left him to do it all. One hundred years ago this year, the farm houses from Quebec to Niagara and westward were once again rejoicing in the presence of the men folk of the family. Two years before not one was to be seen at home. To a man they were at the frontier under Sir George Prevost's, General Proctor's or General Brock's command, a sturdy support to the regulars.

After that stirring war the military spirit of the country was awakened just as we may expect after this war, millenium and peace enthusiasts notwithstanding. Volunteers organised themselves into regiments, mounted and equipped and drilled themselves. Thus began the Governor General's Body Guard. Year after year the Government promised recognition and aid. The recognition came, but the aid did not. Suddenly the tornado burst in the wake of William Lyon Mackenzie. Then the equipment and arms were provided and it was almost entirely due to the militia that the rebellion was so quickly suppressed. For the Governor had allowed almost all the regulars to be sent to crush Papineau. From that time on the country has paid more and more attention to its militia.

Before the birth of the Dominion in 1867, the defence of the country was entirely in the hands of the Imperial Government. It was on the British regulars that the British statesmen mainly relied, but with the example of 1812 and of 1837 before them they were careful to foster a militia of the residents as a background and support. Of this militia we do not now know or hear a great deal, but under other names it provided the nuclei of the best known of the regiments of to-day. All along the frontier there were companies and regiments drilling regularly in spite of bad roads, heavy work and constant neglect from the Government.

Though we are constantly being reminded of our century of peace along the United States frontier the nineteenth century has not been