

The Canadian Militia:—A Historical Sketch.

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AND now we come to the last act in the drama of the history of the Canadian army or militia, the campaign of last year in the North-West, in which, unlike the unrevealed secrets and possibilities of the fifth act in a heavy tragedy on the boards of the Academy of Music, we all know already what the finale has been. And inasmuch as that is the case, I shall confine myself to a very few remarks and reminiscences of the campaign and of the comparatively easy part taken in it by the brigade which I have the honor to command. We left Montreal on the 11th May last, 300 strong, about the tallest and strongest and most soldierly-looking man in the regiment being the *chaplain*. A most excellent soldier was spoilt when he was made a minister. It was a fortunate thing for the people of St. Paul's that we were not called on our arrival at Winnipeg to go on immediately to the front, and then if we had got there to be lucky enough to get into action. The chaplain had only a penknife to defend himself or fight with, but he had, I always thought, a great hankering after one of my revolvers. If I had missed one I know that I should either have accused the chaplain of the robbery, or a certain colored gentleman, though gold was more in his line than steel. He got my patent leather boots with the spurs for which he took them, but alas for Jumbo, they were only plated brass and not gold, as I have no doubt he has found out from the pawnbroker long ere now. Perhaps some of you thought, as he thought himself, that the first duty of the minister of the church was to his own congregation, and that he need not have come up with us. Well, if, as he teaches you to do, you love your neighbors as yourselves, you doubtless love your country, and have at least a kindly feeling for those who were willing to sacrifice much—home, comfort, means, life itself if necessary—for it. You may think I am exaggerating, but I am not. You would scarcely believe the amount of suffering caused by the prolonged absence from home of the bread-winners of so many families, notwithstanding the good work done by the charitable committees, to whom be all praise, and to whom we return most hearty thanks. The men themselves felt anxious about those they had left behind, I know, and were cheered and comforted by the chaplain's kindly words and Christian counsel. He talked to them as a brother and a comrade, preached to them under most impressive circumstances, took hold of their affections by beating them at putting the stone, tossing the caber, and pitching into them most unmercifully for swearing! For myself, and the officers and men of my brigade, I thank the people of St. Paul's church for giving us our chaplain, and if you lost a little by his short absence you have the satisfaction of knowing that the gain to others was great. Surely it was a Christian duty to look after the spiritual welfare of so many men, and I think the chaplain will agree with me when I say that a finer body of men it would be hard for any city to send out. Their conduct while they were away proved this, and they brought nothing but credit to the good city whose name is borne by the brigade to which they belong. And talking of chaplains, let me say that some of the noblest martyrs' blood has been given to this North-West territory. Who can read without a shudder of the fearful tortures suffered by the Jesuit Fathers Brobœuf and Joques and others, at the hands of the cannibal Iriquois, or of the foul murders of Fathers Marchand and Fafard in the recent war? Roman Catholics, you will say. Yes, but all the same men who suffered much and sacrificed their lives for the Christianization and civilization of the world. The missionaries of our Protestant church are few and far between in the North-West. Good men and true they are, and their life is by no means a bed of roses. I happened to meet one at old Crowfoot's Blackfoot reserve—a man of education and culture, and eager in his arduous work of translating the Bible into the Blackfoot tongue, as well as doing good as opportunity offered. In order to show you the sort of persons he had to deal with, I will tell you the answers he gave me to two questions I asked him incidentally. He gave us some preserved milk for our coffee. I said, how is it you have no fresh milk with such splendid pasture for a cow? Oh, he said, I had a cow; but it was no use keeping it. The Indians got up too early in the morning for me and milked it, so I killed it. I noticed a nice patch of potatoes growing, and congratulated him on it. Yes, he said, they look very well, but I doubt if there are any potatoes really there, because, you see, they (the Indians) come over in the dark and pull away the biggest ones under the ridges, and cover the ground over again, so that I never know if I have any potatoes at all until I dig up the stalks in the fall. Parkman tells of a dying Indian, just baptized, asking anxiously whether, in the realms of bliss to which he was bound, *pies* were to be had comparable to those with which the French regaled him. Of the Indian character much has been written foolishly and credulously believed. Yet to the eye of rational observa-

tion there is nothing unintelligible in him. He is full, it is true, of contradictions. He deems himself the centre of greatness and renown—as old Pie-a-Pot said to us, that his name was the terror of his foes all the world over, from the far West, mentioning some unintelligible place, to the very farthest east. Yes; even as far as Winnipeg! Yet, who can help feeling for them? We have taken away their birth-right, their hunting grounds, and driven off their buffaloes, upon which they lived. Whatever civilization can do for them now ought to be done. Let us treat them kindly. Let us send to them more soldiers of the church and we will have less need to send more soldiers of the Queen. The late campaign was by far the most remarkable in Canadian history. Organized at Ottawa by a French-Canadian minister of militia, Sir A. P. Caron, a man of devoted loyalty to the British crown and of great ability—the operations in the field were ably planned and carried out by a British major-general, Sir F. Middleton, to whom too much praise and thanks cannot be given for his thoughtfulness and care for the lives of the citizen soldiers under him. The troops were altogether Canadian militiamen, and I think no one can question that they did their duty well. That they did so, the death roll bears cruel witness to. Never shall I forget that Sunday in Winnipeg when we assisted at the funeral of some of its young citizens who had fallen in the earlier engagements. The following lines on the death of a gallant young trooper, of Boulton's scouts, are not inappropriate—poor D'Arcy Baker, who was lying severely wounded, on hearing the shots fired at a night alarm, raised himself up, called for his horse and rifle, staggered to the door of the tent, and fell dead from the exhaustion of his efforts:—

"My rifle and my horse!" the soldier cried,
As forth with vigorous step he quickly came;
On his young brow the morning sunlight played,
And life was centred in his active frame.
By winding streams, far o'er the plain we go,
Where dark ravines and woody bluffs appear,
Where'er a swarthy, treacherous Indian foe
May hide to burst upon our flashing rear.
'Tis ours to guard the friends who come behind,
'Tis ours to find and search the dangerous shade;
Perchance our lives we lose, but never mind,
When duty calls, let no man be afraid.
The sulphurous smoke is drifting to the sky,
And horse and rider on the plain are spread:
The ambushed foe in sullen terror fly,
The bold and brave are now amongst the dead.
With shattered heart, the stricken soldier lies,
The fatal wound has almost ceased to bleed;
The dying warrior vainly seeks to rise,
And begs once more his rifle and his steed.
Forever more the youthful limbs are still,
The young, the gallant and impulsive brave
Now rests beside the far off western hill,
And wild flowers blossom by his lonely grave.

This campaign will always be memorable as marking a new era in Canadian history, inasmuch as it has shown that we have the means and the men within our own borders for repelling attacks either from within or from without.

Do not, however, go away with the idea that the success of the campaign was brought about without much personal trouble and sacrifice.

A soldier's lot on active service is not by any means a happy one. I know a commanding officer's is not. He is the only responsible head. If anything goes wrong he alone is blamed, and he consequently has to do his duty without fear or favor, and regardless of the offence it is almost inevitable he must sometimes give to parties outside as well as inside his regiment. First to maintain discipline, and then to look after the comfort and welfare of his command, are his two most important and sometimes troublesome duties, but which must not be neglected if the efficiency of the regiment is to be maintained. And here I cannot refrain from alluding, with regret, to the most unsoldierly habit indulged in by a few insubordinate members of the militia force—I cannot call them soldiers—of criticising and decrying, through the medium of the public press, the actions of their superior officers. Such men are a disgrace to the service; and as a rule a man who will write scurrilous anonymous letters is not at all scrupulous as to the truth of what he says. The cowardly part of it is that a commanding officer cannot defend himself. It is like striking a man when he is down, with his hands and feet tied. The militia act says, and very properly so, that no writing in the public press should be permitted, inasmuch as the regulations provide for every man in the service, no matter what his rank may be, receiving ample justice. Notably since the recent campaign in the North-West has this pernicious custom been indulged in, and it is a great pity, for it has detracted from the justly deserved praise given on all sides to the good work done there by the militia force. Although the work we were called upon to do in the North-West was not of a physically arduous nature, yet it was trying enough. We had gone a long way for a fight, and wanted to have one,