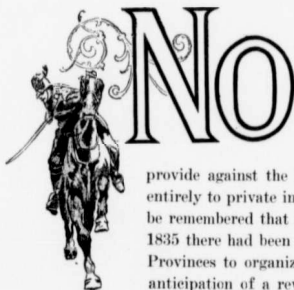


CHAPTER V.

THE REBELLION OF '37-'38.—THE QUEEN'S LIGHT DRAGOONS.

The man who pauses on the paths of treason,
Halts on a quicksand, the first step engulfs him.
—ABRAHAM LINCOLN.



REVOLUTIONISTS could wish for a fairer or more inviting field of operations than was presented to the Upper Canada rebels of 1837. The authorities were absolutely unprepared for an outbreak, and the Governor and his advisers not only refused to believe that there was an actual rebellion afoot, but forbade the most ordinary precautions being taken to

provide against the impending trouble. What precautions had been taken were due entirely to private initiative, and had been made in spite of official opposition. It must be remembered that the rebellion in the two Provinces went hand in hand. As early as 1835 there had been a movement among the more loyal class of the population in both Provinces to organize for the defence of the constituted authority of the country in anticipation of a revolutionary movement, but they had been discouraged, if not actually snubbed, for their trouble. In Montreal the movement looking to the organization of defence found expression in the spontaneous raising in 1835 of a body of volunteer riflemen, to be called the "British Rifle Legion," but when the organizers appealed to the Governor for official recognition, he declined, and induced them to abandon their idea.

About the same time, Colonel Fitzgibbon, the hero of the affair at the Beaver Dams during the War of 1812, then residing in Toronto, and occupying a position in the Adjutant-General's office, under the auspices of Sir John Colborne, the then Governor, formed a drill corps for such young men of Toronto as desired military instruction. A handful of well connected and patriotic young men availed themselves of the opportunity, and when the final outbreak occurred, the gallant colonel's volunteer rifle company numbered seventy men, and, as they had been drilled twice a week for some time, must have had a fair idea of the more rudimentary parts of the military work of that day. This purely voluntary body was the only other loyal organization of a military character besides the York Dragoons in the city. There were several revolutionary bodies which met periodically for drill.

Colonel Fitzgibbon's volunteer rifle company has a special claim to a place in the history of the Governor General's Body Guard, for in it the late Colonel George T. Denison (of Rusholme), who commanded the corps for several years, obtained his first military training. The young soldier at the time of the rebellion was twenty-one years of age.

A couple of days before the gathering of the rebels at Montgomery's, Fitzgibbon received