

**THE SECOND RIEL INSURRECTION**

**BY**

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## CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I	The Country--Its Population and Government	1
II	The Early Life and Characteristics of Riel	7
III	The Halfbreed Migration	18
IV	Riel's Mental Attitude--A Supposed Cause of the Insurrection	page 22
	(a) An introduction	22
	(b) His religious tenets	23
	(c) Indications of his sanity	29
	(d) Indications of his insanity	34
V	The Causes of the Insurrection	page 40
	(a) An introduction	40
	(b) The question of scrip	43
	(c) The question of patents	53
	(d) The question of survey	62
	(e) Other contributory influences	page 68
	(1) The disgruntled white speculator	68
	(2) Western Representation in the Dominion Government	72
	(3) Mistrust of the Government Officials	73
	(4) A war of race and religion	79
	(f) A summary	81
VI	The Indian Situation	page 82
	(a) The signing of the treaties	82
	(b) The scourge of smallpox	86
	(c) The disappearance of the buffalo	88
VII	Riel at Work	page 94
	(a) The invitation and acceptance	94
	(b) The influence of his runners	97
VIII	Conclusion	113
****	Bibliography	

On occasion in the history of Canada personal interest and governmental procrastination in the remedying of grievances, either real or imaginary, have aroused and inflamed passions that resulted in violence and insurrection. In Upper and Lower Canada in 1837, the Red River Valley in 1870 and the prairie west in 1885 certain sections of our people, because of religious and social as well as political beliefs and prejudices with varying degrees of justification, or lack of it, have had resort to arms. A study of the second Riel insurrection clearly shows that more care on the part of those in authority and better judgment on the part of those aggrieved, or wiser leadership in their movement of protest, would have rendered unnecessary this last rebellion.

The country affected by the regrettable insurrection of 1885 was that broad expanse of territory stretching from the boundaries of the old postage stamp province of Manitoba, west to the foothills of the Rockies, and extending north from the international boundary to the frozen regions of the arctic districts. At the time it was named the North West Territories but was commonly called The Saskatchewan.

When the sparsely settled district of the Red River was created in 1870 into the province of Manitoba this wide Saskatchewan lay as a vast hinterland and was unpeopled except for approximately thirty thousand Indians (1), many groups of nomadic buffalo hunters who were mostly halfbreeds, the clergy at a few scattered missions, and a large number of Hudson Bay officials. The outward flow of immigration had not yet reached the prairie west. Soon, however, more halfbreeds, as

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(1) "The total number of Indians was 27124."  
Laird, Hon. David      Our Indian Treaties, page 3.

will later be described, who preferred the unorganized districts where they could follow more closely their own customs and ideals, having sold their homes in Manitoba after "The Trouble" of 1870, moved to the Saskatchewan to take up anew their somewhat wild life. Then during 1881 and 1882 many speculators invaded the country. Large numbers of people from the eastern provinces of Canada hurried out and started a land boom.(1) Although there was much speculation, there was also some development of a more permanent nature and the tide of immigration began to increase. Easy homesteading terms were given by the government to induce the immigrants to settle. Any British subject, the head of a family, of the age of twenty one, was entitled to take up a quarter section as a homestead and a quarter section as a preemption. The law required the homesteader to pay a fee of \$10 at the time of his application. Cultivation and a five year residence entitled him to a patent. The period of residence was later reduced to three years and the homesteader might be absent from home six months in twelve.(2) In January, 1885, the Canadian Pacific Railway threw open for sale lands within a 24 mile radius of the railroad, the price ranging from \$2.50 to \$5.00 per acre.(3)

As a result of all this, white people were flocking into the country and the increase in population came most rapidly between 1881 and 1885, just at the time when the spirit of rebellion was

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(1) Steele, Col. S., Forty Years in Canada, page 163.

(2) Begg, A., History of the North West, page 460.

(3) MacRae, A. O., The History of Alberta, page 419.

ripening to a head; and as the natural resources of the prairies were at that time under dominion control the real authority to regulate the situation was the federal government at Ottawa, several thousand miles away, the local North West Council having but very limited power.

When the province of Manitoba was created in 1870 Lieutenant-Governor Archibald of Manitoba was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of the North West Territories. To assist him in the administration of the Territories a council of not less than seven nor more than fifteen members was appointed by the governor-general-in-council. (1) This council functioned until 1875 when a change was made. By the North West Territories Act (2) of that year a Lieutenant-Governor for the Territories alone was provided for and he was to be aided by the council. On October 7, 1876 David Laird was appointed Lieutenant-Governor and it was his function to establish the Council of the North West Territories. This he did (3) and the first meeting was held at Livingstone. The next six meetings were held at Battleford during the

(1) See letter, dated October 22, 1870, to the Secretary of State from Governor Archibald stating that he had appointed Messrs. Johnson, Smith and Brelan to the Executive and Legislative Councils for Rupert's Land and the North West Territories.  
Oliver, E. H. The Canadian North West, page 975.

"In December, 1870, Archibald submitted ten names to Ottawa and in 1871 he sent some more with recommendations that they be made councillors. In 1872 the council became an established fact; eleven men were selected."  
Hawkes, John Saskatchewan and Its People, page 294.

(2) Oliver, E. H. Op. cit., page 1075.

(3) Oliver, E. H. Saskatchewan and Alberta--A General History 1870 to 1912, Canada and Its Provinces, Volume XIX, pages 200 ff.

years of 1878, 1879 and 1881 but in 1883 the capital was transferred to Regina and from then on the council met there.

The act of 1875 also made provision for the introduction of representative government. When a district of a thousand square miles should have a population of a thousand it was to elect a representative to the council, and as soon as the elected members reached 21 the council was to be abolished and a legislative assembly was to take its place. The first election was held in March, 1881, in the district of Lorne near Prince Albert. The Hudson Bay factor from Carleton, Lawrence Clarke, was here elected a member of the North West Council. The following table shows the change in proportion of elected and appointed members:-

*Carleton  
CNR*

Session	Appointed	Elected	
1877	3	-	
1878	4	-	
1879	4	-	
1881	4	1	(1)
1883	5	6	
1884	6	8	
1885	6	13	
1886	6	14	
1887	6	14	

This supports the previous statement that "the increasing population came most rapidly between 1881 and 1885, just at the time when the rebellion spirit was ripening to a head."

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(1) Ibid, page 204.

In the early 70's because of the class of population and because of of the fact that the period was a sort of an interregnum (1) lawlessness and disorder were rife. Warring tribes of Indians, horse thieves, whiskey peddlers and other undesirables aided by their proximity to that haven of refuge, the American boundary, were plying their nefarious trades. Lieutenant Butler, having been sent by the government of Canada to reconnoitre conditions in the Saskatchewan, gave in his report to Lieutenant-Governor Archibald a graphic account of such irregularities,

"Law and order are wholly unknown in the region of the Saskatchewan in so much as the country is without any executive organization and destitute of any means of enforcing law."

"As matters at the present rest, the region of Saskatchewan is without law, order or security for life or property; robbery and murder for years have gone unpunished; Indian massacres are unchecked even in the close vicinity of the Hudson's Bay Company posts and all civil and legal institutions are entirely unknown." (2)

To control the lawless elements, but only after considerable political bickering, in 1873 the government at Ottawa, with Sir John A. Macdonald as leader, passed an act to create the now famous corps, known originally as the North West Mounted Police. Soon 500 mounties were patrolling the plains and checking this lawlessness to a considerable degree. In 1885 the Dominion government passed a law to increase this force to 1,000. Captain Deane was quite surprised one day to receive a telegram at noon saying that "130 recruits will arrive tonight at midnight and require supper." (3)

- (1) The Hudson's Bay Company, which had controlled the country for two centuries, had given up its right so to do and had surrendered its authority to the Dominion of Canada which had legally, but not visibly taken possession.
- (2) Butler, W. F. The Great Lone Land, page 357 and 366 (Appendix prints his report).
- (3) Deane, Captain Burton, Mounted Police Life in Canada, page 22.

As a background for a clear understanding of the Second Riel Insurrection one must keep in mind these facts about the government, the lack of legal institutions for the preservative of law and order, the vastness and remoteness of the country and the impossibility of so few police adequately patrolling it, and the type of inhabitants who roamed around therein with no memories or traditions to create within them a love for, or loyalty to, the Canadian people who seemed to them to be robbing them of their rightful land and country. As the moving spirit of this insurrection was Louis Riel one must know something of the early life and characteristics of this man who had the bad eminence of leading the rebellious movement.



Louis Riel was the son of a French mother, Julie Lajimodiere, and of Louis J. Riel, a French halfbreed, who owned and operated a little mill on the Seine River in St. Boniface and who was widely known as the "Miller of the Seine". The father, possessing the ability to make fiery, inflammatory speeches, had considerable influence over the halfbreed element and in 1849 acted as spokesman and leader of his compatriots in their demand for free trade, successfully protesting against the Hudson's Bay Company restrictions. These qualities he bequeathed to his son but it seems strange that the two Riels, father and son, should lead in agitations that were somewhat contradictory. The elder Riel was a famous antagonist of the Hudson's Bay Company regime, and the younger Riel, while no lover of the Company, opposed the Canadian government which replaced it. The truth seems to be that they were both temperamentally against constituted authority and that they were both afflicted with a megalomania which led each to believe he was divinely ordained to be a liberator. (1)

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(1) For further data see:-

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| Merice, A. G.  | Canada and Its Provinces, Volume XI., page 151.  |
| Lewis, J.      | Canada and Its Provinces, Volume VI., page 35.   |
| MacBeth, R. G. | Romance of Western Canada, pages 108 and 117 (1)<br>Policing the Plains, page 147. (2) |

Bishop Tache recommended the son to patronage in Quebec and Louis was sent to Montreal where he studied for the priesthood at Laval University. (1) Here he acquired "that little bit of knowledge" which "is a dangerous thing" for, making poor progress in college, he returned to his home at the Red River without completing his course but with all the prestige which a college career gave in those days when no one from this community had studied and few had even visited in eastern universities.

Thus he was the type of man one would expect to find leading such a movement as the Red River Trouble, the course of which need not be traced here; but one incident should be mentioned, namely the death of T. Scott, because this, more than any other single incident in Riel's life, determined his fate. While at the zenith of his power in the Red River, Riel felt that he must give a demonstration of his authority and, imprisoning Scott, a young Orangeman from Ontario, on the supposed charge of lack of respect for the provisional Government, Riel had him tried, and shot. By some this was looked

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(1) Louis later acknowledged his indebtedness to Tache in this regard as follows:- "L'education eut votre sollicitude lorsque j'avais douze ans. Pour me sauver de l'ignorance, grace a vous, Monseigneur, j'eus ma place au college des Sulpiciens de Montreal, j'eus l'education et ma jeunesse a vu clair. Mais sans votre protection sans votre bienfaite, comment aurais-je pu m'elever a l'honneur d'ecrire mon nom dans l'histoire?"

Riel, Louis "David" Poesies Religieuses et Politiques,  
poem entitled L'Archeveque de Saint Boniface.  
(no pagination)

upon as a justifiable execution duly carried out by a de facto government but by those less favorable to Riel it was regarded as a cruel murder. (1) Wild rumors concerning gruesome details of the "murder" were circulated and although never supported by much evidence, were widely believed. Such a storm of resentment was aroused among the Ontario Anglo Protestants, especially the Orangemen, that in January, 1872, the Ontario provincial legislature offered a reward of \$5,000 for the apprehension of Riel. (2) The Ontario volunteers who had served in suppressing the movement, notwithstanding the most rigid military discipline, began to threaten violence if the death of Scott were allowed to go unpunished. When Elxear Goulet (3) appeared in the village of Winnipeg he was recognized as one who had been connected with the "murder" and, being pursued to the banks of the Red River, he was drowned while attempting to swim across to the other shore to safety amidst a shower of stones. Yet such were the passions of the

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- (1) Ashdown, J. H., an eye witness to the affair but opposed to Riel, writing years later said, "I never like the expression 'execution' in regard to the killing of Scott. In my opinion it was a brutal murder."

Winnipeg Free Press of February 18, 1928.

Riel himself a few hours before his death on the scaffold, when confessing to Father McWilliams, said, "I have been reproached with the murder of Scott but I was pardoned for that in my conscience. I feel and I swear as I am about to appear before God that I speak the truth, that the shooting of Scott was not a crime. It was a political necessity-----believing it necessary to save the lives of hundreds of others. There is no particle of reproach in my conscience for that."

Quoted in Hawkes, John Saskatchewan and Its People, page 271.

- (2) "\$5,000 to such person or persons as may be instrumental in bringing the murderers of Thomas Scott or any of them to trial."  
Province of Ontario, Proclamation, 1872.
- (3) Grandfather of Roger Goulet now an inspector of public schools in Manitoba.

times that this act was never classed as "murder". (1)

Because of a strong public opinion the government at Ottawa had to preserve openly an attitude of righteous indignation against the slayers of Scott, but inwardly it wished they would clear out and let the trouble blow over. Sir John A. Macdonald sent a letter to Archbishop Tache enclosing a cheque for \$1,000 to be paid Riel to escape, and later Donald Smith advanced \$3,000 which Tache divided between Riel and his lieutenant Lepine. (2) This was not known at the time and when later the policy of aiding Riel to escape, while claiming a desire to catch him, was criticised, Macdonald argued that the safety of the country could be assured only by keeping Riel away. (3)

Though taking refuge in the United States, Riel frequently visited his old home for periods as long as he dared stay. At such times he was in imminent danger because he had many enemies. For personal animosity or for desire to win the monetary reward, men sought to capture him and he had many close escapes, once just departing a few minutes before three ruffians raided his home. But so highly was he esteemed by his own compatriots that in 1874 he was elected to the House of Commons for the constituency of Provencher. He went to Ottawa, took the oath required of members, and narrowly escaped arrest by hiding

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- (1) Martin, C. Political History of Manitoba, Canada and Its Provinces, Volume XIX, page 96.
  - (2) Canada, House of Commons, Journal of 1874, Volume VIII, Report of the Select Committee on the Causes of the Difficulties in the North West Territories, 1869-70.  
Also see, Preston, W. T. R., The Life and Times of Lord Strathcona, pages 44-51 for the use of this evidence to damage the character of Strathcona.
  - (3) Martin, C. Op. Cit., page 96.  
Lewis, J. Op. Cit., page 44.

in the legislative buildings. When he was summoned to appear before parliament he dared not show himself in public or a riot would have ensued. Mr. Mackenzie Bowell moved his expulsion from the House as a "fugitive from justice", a status to which he had been relegated by a grand jury in Manitoba. Sentence of outlawry was passed and he was expelled. Five months later he was re-elected for Provencher but again he dared not take his seat. On February 15, 1875, Alexander Smith laid before parliament the sentence of outlawry which had been passed on Riel by Chief Justice Wood of Manitoba and on February 24 he asked the House to affirm that Riel had justly been declared an outlaw. The motion passed and the seat was declared vacant.

In this same year Mackenzie asked parliament to grant an amnesty to all persons who had been concerned in the Red River Rebellion except O'Donoghue, Lepine and Riel. He suggested that Lepine and Riel should be banished for five years but proposed no measure of clemency for O'Donoghue. He showed the former two leniency because they, at the head of 350 Metis, had offered aid in preventing a Fenian raid threatened in 1871 by O'Donoghue; Governor Archibald of Manitoba had availed himself of their offer, and had publicly thanked them and shaken their hands. Parliament carried out Mackenzie's suggestion and the government heard with well concealed relief that Riel went to the U. S. in exile. (1)

The reaction from too much tension set in and Riel's easily excitable mind broke under the strain. He spent much of his time for the next few years in hospitals for the insane. He was confined under

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(1) Lewis, John Op. Cit., page 44.

an assumed name in the asylum of St. Jean de Dieu at Longue-Pointe and later he was in the Beupert asylum for nineteen months in 1877 and 1878. (1)

Having recovered his reason and being freed from the asylums, Riel lived obscurely in the United States earning a living for himself, his wife and family by his prowess with the rifle, by interfering illegally in politics and by teaching school in St. Peter's Jesuit Mission. (2) He became a naturalized American citizen (3) and seemed always to remember with bitterness the treatment he had

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(1) For evidence, see page 34 of this text.

(2) Hayden, A. L. The Riders of the Plains, page 123.

(3) "The prisoner was living in the U. S. where he had become naturalized under their laws."  
Campbell, A., Minister of Justice, in Sessional papers of 1886, Volume, XI, No. 5, page 5.

received at the hands of the Canadian government. In fact, he seemed to be "nursing his wrath to keep it warm". (1)

Though Riel in 1871 had offered his aid in suppressing a threatened Fenian raid, he now at least considered aligning himself on the side of such a movement for he wrote:-

"Sachez que Washington est plus proche de nous que Londres. Les nombreux rejets de l'Irlande indomptable ne sont pas, sans dessein, dans les Etats Unis. Le jour qu'ils se mettront sous un chef acceptable et qu'ils voudront marcher dans les

- (1) "Deja depuis quatre ans il premeditait les troubles qu'il vient de faire et en avait trace le plan dans un livre ecrite de sa propre main avec du sang de Buffalo."

(Note. The writer has never been able to locate this book.)

Cette lettre est datee--"Batoche, 19 Juin, 1885"

Piquet, Frere La Troisieme Lettre--Le Veritable Riel.

In a long poem written during his exile and entitled "A Sir John A. MacDonald", Riel says in part as follows:

"-----Tout le trouble dont le government rude a Ottawa seul etait l'auteur. Ah, je me suis trouve content de voir a terre un bon matin Sir John avec sa ministere."

"Je fais mon temps d'exil, je mange mon rouge et je suis malgre vous, chef de ma nation. Je n'abandonne pas mon plan, je l'etudie. Et je l'ai travaille d'une facon hardie. J'ai trouve ce que je voulais, je vous connais a fond maintenant, peuple anglais. Le Bas Canada n'est pas libre avec vous. Vous souffrez quand un nom canadien-francais vibre, vous tachez de l'abattre en le persecutant. Vous voudriez remplacer notre religion, vous detestez nos seminaires et je vous ai vu rire de nos savants. Mais, l'anglais est egoiste et plein d'ambition. L'anglais n'est ni droit ni genereux, c'est absolument le contraire. O Dieu Puissant, daignez proteger les Metis que deja les anglais ont presqu'aneantes. Le Bon Dieu m'a donne du coeur et de la taille et je ne mourrai pas sans vous livrer bataille, la bataille du bon sens et celle du droit des gens. Je suis homme a sauter dans l'arene a pieds joints; John Bull m'a trop fait mal, je gagnerai sur lui. Les enfants disperses de la Nouvelle France ont, sous le joug anglais, trop connu la souffrance.

Riel, Louis "David", Op. Cit. (No pagination)

"chemins benis les Canadiens-français et les métis sincères marcheront avec eux comme avec de bons frères. Si vous ne voulez pas que notre fière race se détache sitôt de vous, traitez-la comme il faut, ne vous en montrez pas insensément jaloux." (1)

This indicates quite a change of viewpoint on the part of Riel and shows that Riel in 1865 had not the same sense of loyalty to the British Crown as he had when leading the Red River Trouble; but such is to be expected for in personality and character he was very changeable. His qualities will be more fully brought out during the course of the narrative but a brief outline is here given as being of assistance in understanding the forces which influenced the leader of the rebellion.

In appearance Riel had much in his favour. He was a big man and, though not tall, he had an assertive carriage which gave him distinction and commanded obedience.

"This Riel, the President, the little Napoleon, the Ogre, or whatever else he may be called, was a short, stout man with a large head, a sallow, puffy face, a sharp restless intelligent eye, a square-cut massive forehead overhung by a mass of long, thickly clustering hair and marked with well-cut eyebrows; altogether a remarkable looking face." (2)

A prepossessing physique was not all; other brilliant qualities were not wanting. Inherently religious and fundamentally sincere, he had a magnetic personality and a power of appeal which, aided by a gift of oratory, would have made him a great man and a powerful influence

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(1) Riel, Louis "David" Poem A Sir John A. Macdonald Op. Cit.  
(No pagination)

(2) Butler, Sir W. F. The Great Lone Land, page 133.



for good had he been exempt from his disposition to insanity. Major Boulton, who fought against Riel in both his insurrections believed that "an honorable career might have been open to him" (1) and even one so prejudiced against Riel as MacBeth admitted that "he possessed elements of strength and magnetism." (2) At times his prompt use of force, his subtle use of pretense and emotion, his substitution of threats and violence for a more candid and ordered movement showed an understanding of human nature, particularly that of his own people, and some of his letters and proclamations were almost Napoleonic in their vigour, their adroitness and their appeal to the sensitive side of his countrymen.

On the other hand he was erratic and ill-balanced; there was a lack of common sense and judgment. Once he walked into a house in Montreal and demanded \$10,000 for some Utopian enterprise; (3) again, he rushed into a Catholic church in Montreal and interrupted the service in the midst of mass. (4) On another occasion while in the east he induced his poor old mother to sell her effects in order to supply him with funds necessary for his plans and the fond parent set out on a three weeks journey of four hundred miles in a Red River cart to meet her son but on reaching her destination she found waiting her

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- (1) Boulton, Major      Reminiscences of the North West Rebellion, page 154.
- (2) MacBeth, R. G.      Romance of Western Canada, pages 108 and 209.  
Policing the Plains, page 110.
- (3) Hawkes, John      Op. Cit., page 260.  
Skelton, O. D.      Life and Letters of Sir Wilfred Laurier, page 291 ff.
- (4) Hawkes, John      Op. Cit., page 26.  
Skelton, O. D.      Op. Cit., page 291ff

only a letter from young Riel explaining that still another important mission had presented itself which required him to remain in Montreal.

(1)

He was inordinately vain and ambitious, irritable at reproof or opposition, and easily excitable; (2) consequently he was not a man whose mentality could stand the stress and strain of the circumstances in which he deliberately placed himself. Bishop Tache once said of him that he was gifted with brilliant qualities of spirit and heart but that he used them in the interests of an unbridled ambition which poisoned his intelligence; again, he mentioned Riel's unquenchable thirst for power and his insensate pride. (3)

All told, due to his tendency to insanity, he was a bundle of opposites and to pass considered judgment on him is difficult because the poles of his character were frequently at war. He was deeply religious but a rebel to his church; he had courage to defy the Canadian country and British Empire but had an uncanny faculty to save his own skin; he was apparently sincere in his desire to benefit his fellow-men yet at times was willing to take a sum of money and leave them

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(1) Black, N. F. Op. Cit., page 586.

(2) "Riel was a man of inordinate vanity, excitable, irritable and impatient of contradiction."  
Taylor, Justice, Sessional Papers, 1886, Vol. XIX, No. 12, Return 43a, page 5.

(3) "Une ambition effrenee qui a vicie son intelligence et l'a pousse jusqu'au delire, une soif resordonnee de pouvoir, un orgueil insense qui l'a conduit a l'apostasie, ont ete les mobiles de ses actes."  
Tache, Archbishop Le Veritable Riel (No pagination)

to their fate; (1) he threw himself humbly and fervently on God in prayer but was full of ambition to rule.

By contemporary Anglo-Protestants Riel was regarded as a blood-thirsty ruffian who had tortured and slain an innocent man in cold blood and who was guilty of inexcusable treason; by French Catholics he was lionized and looked upon as a patriot who had taken up arms to defend his own rights and those of his compatriots. To Ontario Riel was either a twice convicted traitor or an American fillibuster; to Quebec he was the most heroic of all the Metis, the upholder of their race, language and religion. (2)

Such was the mixture of good and evil concealed beneath the coarse exterior of the man who was destined to lead the rebellion of 1885. But what of the halfbreeds whose cause he championed? As the second Riel insurrection was born, not on the banks of the Saskatchewan, but on the banks of the Red, it is to conditions there that one must turn.

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- (1) On December 22, 1884, Riel told Pere Andre and Mr. Macdowell, members of the North West Council, that he was "tired of Canada and wished to return to Montana". He asked for \$100,000 from the government, and when the two men told him his price was exorbitant, he reduced his demand to \$35,000 and then to \$5,000, guaranteeing that on receipt of the money he would have the Metis drop all claims against the government. For verification of this statement see:-
- (a) The Queen vs. Riel, Sessional Papers, 1886, Vol. XIX, No. 12, Paper 43. Evidence of Andre at Riel's Trial.
  - (b) Sessional Papers, 1885, Vol. XVIII, No. 13, page 109. Inspector Howe's report to Crozier.
  - (c) Ibid, page 109. Crozier's report to the Comptroller of the North West Mounted Police.
- (2) For further references to Riel's character see:-
- (a) MacRae, A. O., Op. Cit., Vol. 1., page 402.
  - (b) Martin, C., Op. Cit., page 79.
  - (c) Oliver, E. H. Canada and Its Provinces, Vol. 19, page 207.
  - (d) Parkin, G. R. Sir John A. Macdonald (Makers of Canada) page 242.

After the First Riel Rebellion the claims of the halfbreeds were fully met; 1,400,000 acres of land being set aside for this purpose, 240 acres being granted to "each halfbreed born in Manitoba before July 1, 1870". (1) But it was unfortunate that "when the census was taken in Manitoba in 1870 pursuant to granting scrip many Red River halfbreeds were away in the North West Territories and were not included". (2) To rectify this situation a petition was sent to Ottawa in June, 1878, signed by 151 men of Prince Albert "with a view to apportioning to those not already included in the Manitoba census their just allotment of lands and scrip". (3) Soon the province of Manitoba began to fill with settlers from the east whose customs, traditions and temperament were so different from those of the Metis. In order to get rid of the intolerable oppression which they suffered at the hands of the newcomers, oppression to which no less a personage than Governor Archibald testified, most of the Metis almost immediately sold their land for a song, ranging from \$15 upwards, and migrated from the valleys of the Red and the Assiniboine to the valleys of the North and South Saskatchewan. Thus nearly all the 1,400,000 acres of land held by the Metis in Manitoba became the property of non-resident land speculators, much to the detriment of the country the progress of which was thereby retarded. (4)

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(1) Melgund, Lord (Earl of Minto) In the Nineteenth Century, August 1885

(2) Black, N. F. Op. Cit., page 245.

(3) Black, N. F. Ibid, page 246 (Checked Sessional Papers 1879).

(4) Lewis, John Op. Cit., page 100.

Morice, A. G. Op. Cit., page 166.

Boulton, Major Reminiscences of the North West Rebellion, page 142.

In their new location the halfbreeds, following one of their traditional customs, to which they clung most tenaciously and of which they feared they would be robbed by eastern civilization, took up narrow strips of land along river frontage and stretching back as far as one could see a white horse on the prairie on a clear day. (1) They preferred this system of long, narrow farms with river frontage as against the rectangular or square survey proposed by the government, for they thought that social life was fostered by contiguous residence; also the river afforded a ready means of transportation and provided each and all, with water for the stock and fish for the family table. In this secluded region they formed peaceful communities, were hospitable, kind and generous among themselves, respectful and obedient to their priests. Pere Andre, one of these priests, wrote about them in 1885 as follows:-

"Il y a court temps la population semblait heureuse et pleine de confiance dans l'avenir." (2)

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- (1) "The halfbreeds, among themselves, have agreed to take their homesteads 10 chains frontage on the river by 2 miles back."  
Hayden, A. L. The Riders of the Plains, page 124.

"It appears certain that the halfbreeds were determined to hold to the old system of long, narrow farms fronting on the river, as against the rectangular or square survey proposed by the government which threatened to break up the homes they had built and overturn the old social life fostered by contiguous life."  
MacBeth, R. J. The Romance of Western Canada, page 207.

- (2) Andre, Pere Lettre, datee le 24 juin, 1885, Prince Albert.  
Le Veritable Riel. (No pagination)

Riel, being either in the asylums of the east or else in exile in the United States, did not accompany his people to their new home. However, his chief lieutenant, Gabriel Dumont, migrated along with the general trek and became somewhat of a leader. He was a most striking figure.

"This intrepid unlettered buffalo-hunter, grandson of a French Canadian of Montreal was a native of Montreal. At 21 years of age he had become a veritable Indian chief. In more than one encounter on the plains he had given evidence of rare courage. In the Red River rebellion he had fought well and when he finally yielded it was out of loyalty to Bishop Tache rather than to faith in the Dominion government. He became a farmer in the Batoche district on the South Saskatchewan where over 200 French halfbreed families he had actually established a form of government in organization not unlike that used in buffalo hunts." (1)

As leader of this government Dumont ruled with a strict hand. On one occasion a white man, Alexander Fisher by name, started on a buffalo hunt in advance of the main body. This was contrary to custom and as a penalty his property was confiscated. Fisher got the police to protect him and had Gabriel Dumont arrested by Major Crozier. This was in 1875 and Dumont never forgot nor forgave it. (2) In this same year Lieutenant-Governor Morris, having heard that Dumont had organized a provisional government in the Batoche district, ostensibly for the purpose of governing the halfbreeds on the principle that used to prevail in their hunting expeditions, thought that this act would excite the Indians so he ordered General Selby Smyth, who was visiting Fort Pelly, to take a detachment of fifty mounted police from that fort and visit Batoche. Smyth did so and persuaded Dumont to abandon his enterprise. (3)

(1) Oliver, E. H. Op. Cit., page 207.

(2) Walker, Major, of Calgary. In the Calgary Herald, March 18, 1885.

(3) Boulton, Major Reminiscences of the North West Rebellion, page 142.

Dumont and the other halfbreeds remained as farmers in "their new location" but the "secluded region" did not long remain so; and the population which seemed "happy and full of confidence in the future" soon began to have cause first for uneasiness, then for fear, because the civilization, from which they had tried to withdraw, again began to creep up on them from the east causing conditions against which they bitterly complained.

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## of the Insurrection.

A popular fallacy, believed both at the time of the insurrection and since, has been the belief that the rebellion took place because of the insanity of the rebel leader; that, if Riel had not been of unsound mind, there would have been no such struggle. Before examining the real grievances of those who became the insurgents it might be well first to consider this false supposition and to realize that, though Riel had periods of insanity during the course of the rebellion, he was, at its outset, a normal man in full possession of all his mental faculties. The movement, to begin with, was in the main political and social, with a small element of the racial and religious and was brought about by what will later be explained as the real causes of the rebellion. But as events took place, the mind of the leader changed and became deranged. Then the emphasis was transferred, from the political and social, almost entirely to the religious aspect and even this latter took on a different significance. The movement was begun under sane, though unwise, leadership which became more and more fanatical as Riel's mind gradually broke under the strain. To evidence in support of this view let us now turn.



Riel had always been a staunch Roman Catholic, faithful to his church, reverent and obedient to his priests. He now earnestly hoped and confidently expected that the clergy would support him in his rebellious cause. In this he was doomed to disappointment for he met with complete opposition from the entire priesthood which threw its whole weight on the side of law and order. (1) Being of a nature that could not brook contradiction, Riel soon turned against the priests whom he accused of being in league with the foes of the Metis (2) and persecuted them most bitterly (3); he renounced his faith in the

(1) "When we armed ourselves the priests line themselves against us. They would not hear us in confession. It was hard for the Metis to see all that. It was most discouraging. Before that time the word of the priest was the word of truth; but after that we saw that they could tell us lies."  
Gabriel Dumont's speech at the Music Hall, Toronto, April 24, 1868 as quoted by de Tremaudan, A. H. in "Louis Riel's Account of the Capture of Fort Garry", in the Canadian Historical Review, June 1924.

(2) "Mon cher Per:- Les auteurs de la revolte, croyant que nous nous opposons a leur mouvement, ce que nous faisons evidement, nous representent comme des hommes vendus au gouvernement. Nous ne sommes pas des revolutionnaires. Nos peres font ce qu'ils peuvent pour appaiser les sauvages."  
Lettre de Mgr. Grandin, Eveque de Saint Albert, adresse le 26 Avril. Le Veritable Riel, #10.

(3) "Plusieurs fois nous sommes traduits devant l'exevideat, ou, entendant les impietes et les blasphemes de l'exevideat nous sommes obliges Moulin, Vegreville et moi, de defendre notre foi insultee, ce qui nous attire un de luge d'outrages et la menace de nous exposer au feu de l'ennemi si nous nous obstinons a ne pas vouloir ceder au tyran."  
Lettre de Pere Fourmond, datee le 24 Mai, 1865. Le Veritable Riel.

At Riel's trial in Regina, Mr. George Ness, answering questions, gave evidence as follows:-"Jusqu'a cette date lui avez-vous entendu faire aucun remarque insultante pour le pretre?"---"Oui."---"Quand?"---"Au mois de fevrier."---"A cette epoque n'a-t-il pas eu une difficulte avec le Pere Moulin? Veuillez la faire connaitre."---"Il a accuse l'evêque Tache et l'evêque Grandin d'etre des voleurs et des canailles."

The Queen vx. Riel. Sessional Papers 1866, Vol. XIX, No. 12, paper 43.

Roman Catholic church (1) which he now designated as "the Old Roman Woman" (2) and he saw himself as the founder of a new religion.

As the wine of the new movement began to go to his head, Riel's religious fanaticism carried him away and he lost his mental balance in some respects. This will be further shown later on but some evidence is here inserted to throw light on his religious beliefs as they took form and shape during the progress of the revolt.

After the capture of Batoche, the rebel stronghold, the minutes of Riel's Council, which was called the Exovidat--Riel himself taking the title Exovide-- were found. Alternating with motions on other

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- (1) "Pendant les deux mois de sa rebellion il n'y a point d'injures ne de blasphemes qu'il n'ait lances contre notre sainte religion et ses dogmes!"  
Lettre de Pere Andre, le 17 Juin, 1885. Le Veritable Riel #2.

"Il dit que l'eglise catholique est pourrie, il vomit d'horribles blasphemes en presence des missionnaires. Il empeche les Metis d'aller a la masse; il insulte les pretres, menace a les chasser du pays."  
Lettre de Frere Piquet. Le Veritable Riel.

- (2) "La vieille romaine est cassee, le pape est tombe."  
Skelton, O. D., Life and Letters of Sir Wilfred Laurier,  
page 300.

"Louis Riel s'est declare apostat et a voulu fonder une nouvelle religion. Il a renonce au Pape. 'La vieille Romaine est cassee,' disait-il. Il a replace le dimanche par le samedi, il a rejete le dogme de l'Eucharistie, nie la divinite du Christ et celle du Saint Esprit."  
Lettre du Frere Piquet, datee Batoche, le 19 Juin, 1885.  
Le Veritable Riel.

matters the minutes of the Council reveal many decisions on religious matters. Many of these are quite amusing and when it is remembered that some of them were passed at a time when the stress of circumstances would seem to indicate that matters of a more mundane nature were very pressing, they indicate that, not only the leader but also others of the Exovidat were somewhat religiously unbalanced. For example:--

- " 1. The Exovidat of the Metis believes firmly that hell will not last forever, that the doctrine of everlasting punishment is contrary to divine mercy as well as to the charity of our Savior Jesus Christ.
2. That the Lord's Day be put back to the seventh day of the week. (Motion carried by nine ayes and three naves.)
3. Moved by M. Boucher, seconded by M. Tourind that the Canadian Halfbreed Exovidat acknowledges Louis David Riel as a prophet in the service of Jesus Christ, as a prophet the humble imitator of John the Baptist.
4. If God so wills we desire nothing better than to be his priests and at one establish the living Catholic and Apostolic Church of the new world.
5. Proposed by M. Boucher, seconded by Pierre Henry that the commandments of God be the laws of the provisional government, that Archbishop Bourget be recognized from this day as pope of the new world." (1)

(1) Skelton, O. D. Op. Cit., page 300. (Information checked from Sessional Papers, 1886, Vol. XIX, No. 12, Paper 43.)

"He again began to have prophetic visions. He 'assumed sacerdotal functions administering baptism, hearing confession, granting absolution and publicly celebrating confirmation at the altar'. Dr. Daniel Clarke says that "in order to transmit to the congregation the breath of the Holy Spirit he uttered three long and piercing cries." He was fully convinced that he had a divine mission. The Exovidat passed a resolution recognizing Riel as a "Prophet of the world" and under "the visible and most consoling safeguard of St. Joseph as a prophet the humble imitator in many things of Saint John the Baptist. "The Exovidat changed the names of the week and changed the Lord's Day to the seventh day instead of the first "as the Holy Ghost appointed it through his servant Moses."

Hawkes, John, Op. Cit., page 261.

(Information checked from Sessional Papers, 1886, Volume XIX, No. 12, Paper 43.)

At his trial when asked if he wanted to speak, he claimed Divine sanction saying that,

"The same spirit which showed himself to Moses in the midst of the fire and cloud appeared to me in the same manner. I was stupified; I was confused. He said to me; 'Rise up, Louis David Riel, you have a mission to fulfill.' Stretching out my arms and bending my head I received this heavenly message." (1)

Along with the minutes of Riel's Council was Riel's Commonplace Book, written by himself. This too came into the hands of the authorities after the capture of Batoche and contains a curious melange of piety, puerility, posing and mad pride but in general it offers unquestionable internal evidence of sincerity. For example:-

"O God, I pray Thee in the name of Jesus, of Mary, of Joseph, be pleased to sustain me when alone; support me in the enterprise and in the army....O grant to guard the army and the enterprise against Maxime Lepine...O Jesus, O Mary, O Joseph, O Saint John the Baptist, pray for us. Pray for me to the Almighty that the Metis people and myself may do the will of God our Father so that I may accomplish my mission...O my God, grant me grace so that I may reestablish the Day of Rest, to restore to honor the Sabbath Day...The Cree, the Sioux, the Blackfeet, the Blood Indians, the Salteaux, the Sarcees, the Assiniboines, the Gross Ventres, the Peigans, the Redants, the Flatheads, deign to send them all to my assistance so that thy pity may cause them to come from the setting sun; that thy charity may bring them swiftly on the wings of the wind. I hear the voice of the Indian, He comes to join me. He arrives from the north....(After Fisk Creek he wrote)....The Spirit of God in speaking to me of the Metis nation said, 'I have come to be annoyed at it for it is too negligent. It is not sufficiently vigilant and obedient.'.....(He ordered a fast and wrote)... O my Metis nation, take courage; your four days of fasting, prayer and mortification have produced in you the admirable points of conversion, I see your change; it is grand." (1)

At times Riel, in a spirit of religious fanaticism yet with an evident sincerity which one admires as well as pities, had periods of self-

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(1) Sessional Papers, 1886, Volume XIX, No. 12, Paper 43.

accusation when he would pray most devoutly for guidance. Then he would see visions giving him signs and omens.

"O my God, make me to see that I do nothing of myself. O Jesus, work for the glory of our Heavenly Father and at the same time cause that I speak His word with all boldness..... O Mary, I do not deserve that God should direct and assist me, but for the love of Jesus Christ, pray that He may continue to me His perfect direction and His victorious and triumphant assistance.....The Spirit of God informed me that the appearance of Captain Taillefer was a providential act in celebration of the inauguration of Ignatius Pierre Bourget as Universal Bishop.....The Spirit of God shows me that my righteous actions were mingled with certain feelings and opinions which tarnished the whiteness and innocence of my soul." (1)

As various events happened particularly during the course of the rebellion

Riel was moved to see visions. For instance after the battle of Fish

Creek where many of the rebels' horses were killed Riel wrote:-

"Oh my Metis nation, you have long offended me by your horse-racing, by your bets on horse races, by your stubbornness, by your hateful contention over these bad horse races. It is on this account that the Eternal Christ said that, 'yesterday, while sparing you, I have killed your horses'." (1)

Towards the last when his Indian allies were failing him he was moved to write,

"O my God, for the sake of Jesus Christ, of Mary, of Joseph and of Saint John the Baptist, cause them they all may come to us speedily, armed with good weapons and with a great quantity of ammunition." (1)

Again as Middleton's army approached Batoche Riel realized that his "men are nothing more than little boys and their wives little girls.

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(1) Sessional Papers, 1886, Volume XIX, No. 12, paper 43.

"good only for fooling" (1) and he had visions of seeing Batoche, which he calls De Bonne Chairville, captured, not because of the strength or wisdom of the victors, but because of the sins and follies of the Metis (2).

Much further evidence might be submitted to show that Riel considered himself the prophet of the new world, called by God and inspired by visions from above. He promised immunity from bullets to those of his followers who entered battle; during engagements he himself carried a crucifix rather than a gun; and, as the minutes of the Council show, the military operations of the Metis were shaped and often hampered by signs and omens occurring in Riel's disordered visions. Moreover, he succeeded in transmitting to his followers much of his own religious fervour and fanaticism. Lepine's account of Fish Creek seems to indicate that the poor simple mistaken folks thought themselves in immediate contact with the Divine. (3)

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(1) Sessional Papers, 1886, Volume XIX, No. 12, paper 43.

(2) "De Bonne Chairville, formerly well situated, is now abandoned. I ask for help. I wish to rouse up those who slumber in the deep sleep of their sins. They don't understand. They don't hear. They don't obey me. The enemy comes up the river. He arrives. He proceeds to bombard the town. How is it going to resist? Nobody takes its interest to heart. It is going to fall for having first abandoned God. God also abandons it. It is all over with it."

Ibid.

(3) "We thought of our wounded and it seemed to me that the only assistance I could leave them was the crucifix I held in my hand all day. We were praying all the time and I had the crucifix and I said, 'We shall commend ourselves to God and pray that we may have perfect contrition so that if we die we may save our souls.' And then I prayed for I thought we were about to die and I had doubts as to the justice of our cause. Delorme said to me, 'We must pray to God to take us out of here.' We prayed all the day and I think prayer did more than bullets."

Quoted in Black, N. F. Op. Cit., page 584.

Much has been said and written both at the time of Riel's trial and since his execution concerning the question of Riel's sanity and even those who knew him best differ so widely in their opinion concerning it that the student of to-day can scarcely hope to prove conclusively either side of the case. One can but examine the evidence for and against, and then express a personal viewpoint. Let us first consider the evidence purporting to prove his sanity, dividing the facts into two sections, namely the actions and words of Riel himself and then the evidence of the opinions of others who were in a position to judge him.

Riel had been discharged from the Beauport asylum in 1878 as a sane man and for the next six years had lived a normal life supporting a wife and family normally and teaching school satisfactorily. Although having a streak of the ultra-religious in him it is beyond dispute that at least during this period of time he was quite in his right mind. The courteousness with which he received the Halfbreed delegation sent to Montana to invite him to the Saskatchewan, the careful consideration which he gave to their request before accepting, the absence of undue haste in arriving at the scene of his endeavors as well as the moderation which he at first advised and showed, all point to the same conclusion, that they were the actions of a sane man.

At his trial, when his defence council put in a plea of insanity, Riel took vigorous objection, claiming that the government was trying to prove him guilty and his friends were trying to prove him insane but that life without the dignity of an intelligent being was not worth having. He addressed the court very eloquently for some time in defence of his own sanity and pleaded that he was right in what he did. In fact he

quarrelled with his own lawyers in open court, refused to be guided by them, insisted on speaking without their permission or advice. Much time was lost when his lawyers refused to continue unless the judge would compel the prisoner to leave his case entirely in their charge. It is true that an insane man is the last person to admit his infirmity but one cannot help but feel that at that time Riel was sincere and correct in his claim for recognition as intelligent.

If Riel had lost his mental balance during the course of the rebellion, he at least regained it before his death on the scaffold. As one reads the accounts of his last few days before his execution one cannot but feel impressed with the fact that he was not a man agitated mentally. He renounced his opposition to the Roman Catholic Church, earnestly begged pardon of those priests whom he had insulted and died a firm believer in the Catholic faith. The night before his death Riel charged Father Andre as follows:-

"Vous irez a Saint Boniface, n'est-ce pas, mon Pere? Eh bien, Quand vous y irez vous vous prosternez devant Mgr. Tache et lui demanderez pour moi pardon des paroles effrayants que j'ai prononcees contre lui." (1)

These are not the words of an insane man; rather they are those of a penitent one.

Later, Father Andre wrote to Hon. Mr. Lemieux that:-

"Riel manifested not the least symptom of fear. He prayed. He had not a word of complaint at his death sentence. He said to me, 'I am glad to die. Do not fear. The thought of passing my life in an insane asylum or in a penitentiary, mingling with all the scum of society, fills me with horror. I thank God for having spared me this trial and I accept death with joy and gratitude.'" (2)

(1) Le Veritable Riel, Letter 14.

(2) Quoted from Black, N. F., History of Saskatchewan and the North West Territories, Volume 2, page 599.



### Indications of his Sanity.

These are the normal sentiments of a normal man; are they the sentiments of an insane one?

One reads with tears the last letters Riel wrote to his relatives and believes they are not the letters of a lunatic.

"My dear Mother: I received your letter of blessing,----  
To my wife, my children, my brothers, my sister-in-law  
and other relatives who are all dear to me, say farewell on  
my behalf. Dear mother, it is the desire of your eldest  
son that your prayers for me may mount up, that mercy and conse-  
lation of God may be shed upon you, upon my wife, my child-  
ren and other relatives.---You who have been for me so good  
a mother may God, when your last hour sounds, be so pleased  
with piety that he will cause your spirit to be born on wings  
of angels. It is now 2 A.M. of this day, the last I am to  
pass upon this earth. God is holding me in his hand to keep  
me in peace and quietness.---I am doing what I can to be  
ready. I am even calm. Yesterday and to-day I prayed God  
to reassure you so that your heart may not be troubled. I  
am brave. I embrace you with all affection. I embrace you as  
a son respectful to his duty; you, my dear wife, as a christian  
husband,---I embrace your children, entrusting them to divine  
mercy. And you all, brothers, sister-in-law, relatives and  
friends, I embrace with all the affection with which my heart  
is capable. Dear mother, I am your son affectionate, obedient,  
and submissive. Louis David Riel." (1)

The Calgary Herald reporter and Sheriff Chapleau interviewed Riel  
on the eve of his execution.

"So you have come to me with the terrible announcement.  
Well I am glad to go and be relieved of my suffering.  
I want my body given to my friends at St. Boniface to  
be buried. I have only this (hand on heart). I was  
willing to give it to my country fifteen years ago and  
it is all I have to give now. I made my peace with God  
and am as prepared to die now as I can be at any time.  
I shall not be weak. I feel when the last moment comes  
I shall find wings to carry me upward." (2)

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(1) Quoted in Hawkes, John Op. Cit., page 273.

(2) Ibid. page 271.

Riel went quietly to the scaffold from where he said, "I ask forgiveness of all men and I forgive all my enemies." (1) Would an insane man have done so?

Let us now turn to evidence furnished by those who knew Riel. At the trial a commission was formed to determine Riel's mental condition and the reports of the various doctors were submitted as evidence:-

"Except upon certain purely religious questions-----he was when first entrusted to my care and still continues to be perfectly sane and accountable for his actions....I record my opinion that with the reservation made above, Riel is a sane, clear headed and accountable being and responsible for his actions before God and man." (2)

"I have come to the conclusion that he suffers under hallucinations on political and religious subjects but on other points I believe him to be sensible and can distinguish right from wrong." (3)

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(1) Quoted in Hawkes, John Op. Cit., page 271.

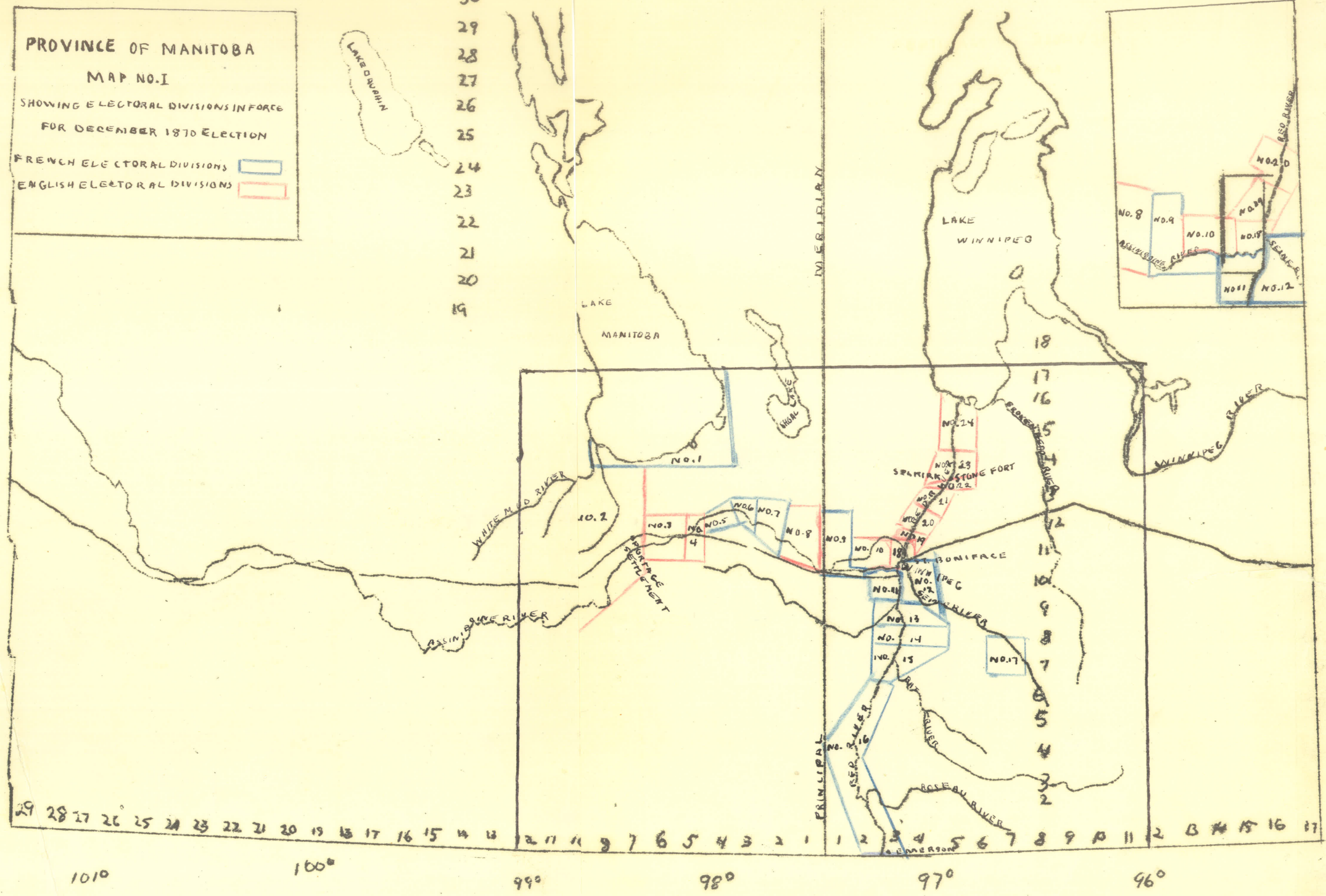
(2) Jukes, A., Senior Surgeon reporting from Regina, November 6, 1885 to Hon. Edgar Dewdney, The Queen vs. Riel--Riel--Sessional Papers, 1886, Vol. XIX, No. 12, paper 43.

Reporting one month later the same doctor wrote about ".....Riel, Jackson and Pareneau, the two latter of whom were actually insane and the former owing to certain peculiar mental characteristics, very imperfectly comprehended by the public at large, was by some reputed to be so.....Respecting Riel, whatever differences of opinion may now appear to exist, the calm verdict of posterity will surely be that Riel died a perfectly accountable man." Sessional Papers, 1886, Vol. XIX, No. 6, page 83.

(3) Valade, F. X., M. D., reporting from Regina, November 8, 1885 to Sir J. A. Macdonald, The Queen vs. Riel--Sessional Papers, 1886 Vol. XIX., no. 12, paper 43.

**PROVINCE OF MANITOBA**  
**MAP NO. I**  
 SHOWING ELECTORAL DIVISIONS IN FORCE  
 FOR DECEMBER 1870 ELECTION  
 FRENCH ELECTORAL DIVISIONS   
 ENGLISH ELECTORAL DIVISIONS

30  
 29  
 28  
 27  
 26  
 25  
 24  
 23  
 22  
 21  
 20  
 19



29 28 27 26 25 24 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17  
 1010 1000 990 980 970 960

"I am of the opinion that the said Louis Riel, although holding and expressing foolish and peculiar views as to religion and general government, is an accountable being and capable of distinguishing right from wrong." (1)

The priests who knew Riel well and who were with him in his last moments, hearing his confessions, reported that:-

"Il est impossible d'etre plus sain d'esprit qu'il ne l'etait; jamais homme n'a ete plus fortifie que lui par la puissance de la foi et jamais homme n'a reconnu plus sincerement ses fautes passees. J'ai vu Riel, j'ai converse avec lui, j'ai pris le temps voulu pour etudier son case avec calme, et je dois dire que sa fin n'a pas ete celle d'un fou." (2)

"Plus on examine sa conduite, plus on reste convaincu que cet homme ne faste sous l'apparence de folie, conservait la plenitude de sa raison." (3)

Whatever opinion one has, then, concerning Riel's mentality, one must realize that at least during his last days he was not insane.

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(1) Lavell, Dr. M., reporting from Regina, November 8, 1885 to Sir J. A. MacDonald, The Queen vs. Riel--Sessional Papers, 1886, Vol. XIX., No. 12, paper 43.

(2) McWilliams, Father C. A. Le Veritable Riel. #15.

(3) Piquet, Frere La troisieme lettre, Le Veritable Riel.

On the other hand there is considerable evidence to show that Riel was insane at times during the rebellion and therefore not responsible for his actions.

Mention has already been made of Riel's early tendencies towards insanity and his confinements in the asylums of the east. Let us review these facts in the words of Skelton when he writes:-

"At college, dreaming wild dreams of a religious mission he was to perform, demanding from Montreal acquaintances \$10,000 to carry on his crusade, urging his feeble-minded old mother to sell her effects to aid him, and then, after she had journeyed over 400 miles by ox-cart to meet him, writing her that a new mission required him to remain in Montreal....He spent a short period in the United States undergoing confinement for part time in a private asylum maintained by Major Edmund Mallet in Washington. Then back in Canada. For three years his presence in Quebec was an open secret. In 1876 he entered a church in Montreal, and noisily interrupted mass. He was arrested and on certificate of two doctors immured in Longue Pointe Asylum near Montreal, under the assumed name of Louis David. His outbursts of violence proved too much for the Sisters and under the name of La Rochelle he was transferred to Beauport Asylum near Quebec. From these quarters during his lucid periods he sallied forth from time to time until he was discharged in 1878." (1)

Admitting, then, that Riel had been insane but that he had recovered, what evidence is there to support the statement that "

"Had his mind been able to stand the strain of a new agitation there was no reason to fear that he might not have led the movement to a successful issue. With contradiction Riel became more and more irritable. When reasoned with he became violent and fell into excesses of language. Profoundly religious though he was, it became evident that politics were leading him into a whirlpool. In a word, the turmoil of the agitation was bringing on a return of the disease which had sent him to Beauport." (2)

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(1) Skelton, O. D.. Op. Cit., page 291ff.

(2) Morice, A. G. The History of the Catholic Church in Western Canada, page 171, 172.

To begin with, it will be noted that even those doctors who examined Riel at the time of his trial and held him sane, admitted that on the matters of religion and politics he was not normal, and there were other doctors who went even further than this and held that Riel was of unsound mind. Dr. Ray of Beauport Asylum and Dr. Clarke, superintendent of Toronto Asylum were both of this opinion. On July 28, 1885, Dr. Clarke visited Riel in the Regina prison and reported as follows:-

"I stated to him that his lawyers were trying to save his life by proving that he had been insane. He got very excited and paced up and down his cell like a chained animal till his irons rattled, saying, 'My lawyers do wrong to try and prove I am insane. I scorn to put in that plea, I, the leader of my people, the centre of a national movement, a prophet and priest, to be proved an idiot.' He impressed me very strongly as being so like the insane with delusions of greatness, whether paretics or not. Dr. Ray and myself had a second examination of Riel at the police barracks on the evening of July 28. The insanity plea was abhorrent to him. He would rather die as a deliverer than live assa lunatic." (1)

He later reported that:-

"Riel was simply a case of evolutionary insanity which would be classed as one of the paranoiac forms of dementia. First manifestations were observed in him when he was at a critical period of his boyhood. Among well educated people his mental defect would have led to his confinement in an institution but among the Metis Riel became a leader. Those of us familiar with paranoia do not for one moment think that 19 months in Longue Point and Beauport resulted in a cure. If left alone at St. Pierre he might have been alright but it was an evil hour for him when Dumont came. Before Duck Lake, Riel was a mental weakling, after that a maniacal paranoiac." (2)

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(1) Quoted in Black, N. F., Op. Cit., page 590.

(2) Clarke, Dr. A Critical Study of the Case of Louis Riel, in the Queen's Quarterly, April 1905.

Concerning his sub-normalcy in the matter of politics let us examine a letter which Riel wrote during the early part of his imprisonment in Regina in 1885.

"	Jesus	Marie	Joseph
	Sauvez-nous	Intercedez pour nous	Priez pour nous

J'implore un proces complet, et a la Cour Supreme. Si vous cedez a mes instances, si vous m'accordez toute la latitude dont j'ai besoin pour me defendre Dieu me secourant, non seulement je me clairerai, mais la grande responsabilite des troubles du Nord Ouest en '69 and '70 et en '85 tombera courdemment sur les Honorable Messieurs Blake et McKenzie et sur les journaux leurs principaux organes. (1)

Flattering Macdonald by laying the blame on his political apponents, are these the words of an astute schemer or an unbalanced thinker? One inclines to the latter view when one remembers that just a few years previously Riel had written a poem giving a long tirade against Macdonald, saying:-

"Ah, je me suis trouve content de voir a terre un bon matin Sir John avec son ministere. Je me rirai de lui; je passerai sa porte en disant, 'Malfaissant, que le Diable, apres tout, si tu le veux, t'emporte'." (2)

Further on in his letter he wrote:-

"La Manitoba profite, mais il me fait penser a ces personnes qui engraisent sans avoir de sante. Il ne lui serait peut-etre pas inutile que j'arrivasse un jour a son ministre. ....J'avais l'honneur de vous dire dans ma communication du 6 courant que L'Irlande, c'est que je pense, pouvait devenir heureuse, et en meme temps les Seigneurs Anglais continuer a avoir leur revenue comme l'ordinaire. ....Si mon pays natal m'honorait un jour au point de me fair asservir au premier siege de son ministre je vous soumettrais mes vues."

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- (1) Deane, Captain Burton Mounted Police Life in Canada, page 187 ff.
- (2) Riel, Louis David Poesies Religieuses et Politiques, Poem a Sir John A. Macdonald.

"Dans le cas ou il vous serait possible de les approuver je vous les presenterais pour mettre fin aux "Better terms" qui fatiguent la Confederation sans apporter d'melioration definitive au Manitoba. Vous me procuriez sans doute l'avantage de modifier en mieux ce que je n'aurais pas encore assez mure dans mes manieres de voir. Apres les avoir inaugurees dans la jeune province vous seriez a meme d'examiner comment mes idees fonctionneraient. Si elles réussissent vous pourriez les generalizer a tout la Puissance. De la, Mere Patrie en jugerait elle meme. Et avant trop longtemps peut-etre auriez vous la gloire, et moi le plaisir de les voir appliquer a la situation de l'Irlande par la Haute Autorite de Parlement Anglais meme." (1)

Imagine any sane man, on the point of being tried for his life asking that he be made premier of his erstwhile province in order that his ideas might work out a panacea for all the ills of Manitoba and later of Canada and ultimately of Ireland--Ireland of all places.

"Monsieur le Premier Ministre, les meilleurs idees ont besoin d'etre comprises pour etre mises en vogue. Et lors la main de Dieu et celle des mes amis me ferraient sortir de ma prison pour me porter a la tete du Ministere Provincial du Manitoba, il me serait encore bien difficile de fair mon chemin, s'il n'y avait pas la un gouverneur qui me compris. Depuis que je suis a Regina tous mes ecrits ont passe par les mains de Monsieur le Capitaine Deane. Ce noble officer connait mes facons de penser. Et pour ne pas le gner, en lui faisant aupres de vous, des louanges qui ont a passer par son office, je vous disais tout court que ce serait, a mon avis, un honneur pour le Manitoba d'avoir un Lieutenant Gouverneur tel que lui, et pour l'Hon. Monsieur Aikens un successeur d'aussi grands merits et pour moi un guide dont les conseils me seraient si utiles. Ce serait comme naturellement que vous pourriez le nommer Lieutenant Gouverneur du Manitoba." (1)

What kind of man is this who dares to claim that he be made premier of Manitoba and that his jailer be the lieutenant-governor--a sane man? Surely not.

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(1) Deane, Captain Burton

Mounted Police Life in Canada,  
pages 187 ff.



Evidence of his sub-normalcy in the matter of religion has to some extent been previously given. The pages of his Common Place Book, seized at Batoche, are filled with the incoherent outpourings of a disordered mind:-

"The Spirit of God showed me that I had a piece of wood of some length under my feet. I gave it several strokes with an axe. I suppose four, and it seemed to me that these four strokes had no more force than if I had only given two. I had scarcely perceived this yet I had made formidable notches on the long piece from the aspen tree of good size, which I had under my foot. I shall hold it under my right foot and remain, axe in hand.....The Spirit of God put me into a conveyance with Michael Dumas. We set out for the U. S. I parted from him. I returned; he went on. As I was looking at him proceeding on his way I perceived a large red colored serpent which went after him. I turned back. All swarmed with serpents. There were more serpents than I could tell you of. O, the invitation of American help is a dangerous one. Take care of adventurers from the U. S. for I assure you they are to be feared. They are dirty dogs, foul jackals, raving wolves, furious tigers. O, my God, preserve us from having anything to do with the U. S. I have lived miserably in the U. S. among serpents, in the very midst of poisonous vipers. The ground was positively alive with them. The U. S. are a perfect hell for an honest man. ....The Spirit of God said to me, 'the enemy has gone to Prince Albert.' I prayed saying, 'Deign to make me know who that enemy is.' He answered, 'Charlie Lawrence'. The Spirit of God has shown me where I shall be wounded, the highest joint of the ring finger. He pointed out to me where it was on his own finger. While I was praying the Spirit of God showed me two or three men, one of whom had a red tongue I have seen the giant. He is hideous....There is left to him nothing but the head. He has his head cut off..." (1)

At the trial Father Andre said that the unanimous verdict of the priesthood was that Riel was a fool in politics and religion and to discuss

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(1) Sessional Papers, 1886, Volume XIX, No. 12, Paper 43.

them with him was like a red flag to a bull. Father Fourmond, who followed, said that Riel was like two men; privately he was polite and charitable but he was not sane in politics and religion. (1)

Had Riel lived a quiet normal life, free from excesses, with consequent worry and strain, it is probable that he would have lived out his three score and ten years duly respected as a sane man with an ultra-religious tendency; as it was, does it not seem that in 1885 he had periods of real insanity followed by periods of clarity of reason; times when, under the stress of disappointment, worry and fear, or when under the elation of apparent victory and triumph, his old weakness of 1877 and 1878 returned and took almost complete mastery of him only to be followed, during periods of comparative calm, by a return of at least partial normalcy? No one believes him an idiot; no one thinks him a master. The truth lies in between. But one fact seems sure--any derangement which he may have had, came upon him as the insurrection developed. Consequently one must believe that the rebellion caused his insanity, not that his insanity caused the rebellion. Thus the "popular fallacy" is dispelled. The insurrection took place because of the grievances of the halfbreeds, not because of the insanity of their leader.

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(1) The Queen vs. Riel, Sessional Papers, 1886, Vol. XIX, No. 12, Paper 43.

The Metis felt keenly that they had good and sufficient causes for serious complaint; the government officials claimed blandly that alleged causes were but fanciful excuses. One such official, having examined a locality after the insurrection, when it was possible to pick out a district which would show favorable results, reported to his superior officer in a manner interesting because of its apparent attempt at self-exoneration. He claimed that six alleged causes of the rebellion had been advanced by the Metis as follows:-

- "1. That the halfbreed settlers did not receive patents for their lands, through delays, the fault solely of the government, which rendered it impossible for them to obtain entry for the lands settled upon.
2. That, owing to the system of surveys, these parties were unable to obtain the land they settled upon and improved prior to survey.
3. That they were entitled to the same rights as had been accorded to the halfbreeds of Manitoba.
4. That the lands on which they had for years resided had been sold over their heads to others, chiefly speculators.
5. That the timber dues had proved very onerous to them and were a grave cause of dissatisfaction.
6. That the dues for cutting hay on government lands were onerous and a cause of great dissatisfaction." (1)

In these words did William Pearce, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, report to Hon. T. White, Minister of the Interior upon all claims to land and right to participate in the North West halfbreed grant. They form in large part, though not entirely, an adequate background for an understanding of the influences which brought about the unfortunate rebellion.

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(1) Sessional Papers, 1886, Volume XIX, No. 6, Page 1 of report.

At the same time, having examined the claims of 258 halfbreeds including, he said, the twenty-one chief leaders of the rebellion settled on the South Saskatchewan, he reported on each of the above alleged causes. Concerning the first:-

"This report shows that of the 258 settlers at the time of the outbreak, not one was unable to obtain patent for his land through the action, or rather non-action, of the government and even in March 1884 there were only 10 cases of delay." (1)

If this were true, one cannot help but feel that the superintendent examined a district which he was sure would show results not too unfavorable to his administration for it is certain that the figures did not represent the true conditions of the country in general even if the district did include the twenty-one leaders of the rebellion. (2)

In refutation of the second alleged cause he claimed:-

"That not one of the 258 ever lost one inch of land through the system of survey when such survey was made subsequent to settlement." (3)

Again this was a favorable district. In any case, the fear of losing is, under some circumstances, just as potent an influence as the actual loss.

Regarding the third, he reported:-

"That 92% of the 258 had no rights as North West halfbreeds. Of that 92%, those who were halfbreeds had participated in all the rights accorded those people in Manitoba." (3)

But what about the other 8%? Did they not matter? Moreover, those who had participated in the rights in Manitoba had good grounds for claiming similar treatment in Saskatchewan, as will be shown.

(1) Sessional Papers, 1886. Vol. XIX, No. 6, Page 7 of report.

(2) In substantiation of this view see page 57 of this text, showing that "10 cases" were a laughable fraction of those which must have existed

(3) Sessional Papers, 1886, Vol. XIX, No. 6, page 7 of report.

His argument to refute the fourth was:-

"That not one settler in the district had an acre of land sold over his head, to which he had any claim." (1)

The evidence which follows speaks for itself; but even if there were no facts of losing, what about the fear of losing?

He claimed that the truth about the fifth and sixth was:-

"That the timber dues were not onerous, amounting to only 5 cents per settler per annum. That the hay permit question never affected them." (1)

The last two causes mentioned admittedly affected only a few districts and, even there, were but minor grievances. On the major issues it is hard to see how the government of the day could escape the blame for gross carelessness, lack of foresight, and inexcusable procrastination.

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(1) Sessional Papers, 1886, Volume XIX, No. 6, page 7 of report.

Many of the Metis on the Saskatchewan were the same people or relatives of the same people who had received scrip in Manitoba in 1870, but they claimed they should receive 240 acres of land here in the west in addition to what they had received in Manitoba, arguing that, if a homesteader after having fulfilled his homestead duties could receive the title deeds to his land and immediately sell it and get a new homestead, they too were entitled to another issue of scrip. Moreover, there were many halfbreeds who had been absent when the issue was made in Manitoba; consequently they had not received the grant to which they were entitled and they now made strong and frequent appeals for it, claiming that absence at the time should not constitute grounds for forfeiture. The policy of granting this had always been contemplated by the government but action had been held in abeyance in spite of the many petitions made. It is significant that many of the English settlers, of whom there was a community of about 6,000 at Prince Albert and another of 1,500 near St. Laurent, sympathized with the halfbreeds in their claims until the actual taking up of arms, and of course the unscrupulous land speculator kept urging the Metis on in the matter. Repeated requests between 1873 and 1885 were sent to Ottawa both in writing and in person, the language varying from pathetic prayers to impatient demands.

In 1873 John Fisher and others petitioned through Governor Morris for land grants. The following year John Mackay informed the North West Council at Fort Garry, which forwarded the matter to Ottawa, that some 300 English halfbreeds at Prince Albert as well as the French halfbreeds at St. Laurent claimed allotments of land and Rev. Father Decorby,

missionary at Qu'Appelle, wrote to Hon. Mr. Laird, Minister of the Interior, concerning the anxiety of the halfbreeds over their lands. In 1876, Inspector Walker of the Mounted Police called the attention of the minister to the claims of 150 families at Prince Albert Mission, and in 1877 still 43 other names were signed to a petition forwarded to Laird from Prince Albert while 269 signatures came to him from Cypress Hills. (1)

In 1878, various petitions duly signed by as many as 400 names were sent from St. Laurent, St. Albert, Prince Albert and Cypress to Laird, who was then Lieutenant-Governor of the Territories, setting forth, among other matters, that:-

"Your petitioners humbly represent that their rights to a participation in the issue of halfbreed or old settlers' scrip are as valid and binding as those of the halfbreeds and older settlers of Manitoba." (2)

These petitions were all forwarded by Laird to Ottawa and were acknowledged either by David Mills, the Minister of the Interior, or his deputy Dennis, (2) promising consideration. With each petition Laird sent a personal message saying:-

"I have no doubt that the halfbreeds of the North West Territories who think they have as good a claim to consideration as their compatriots in Manitoba will be very much dissatisfied unless they are treated in a somewhat similar way.....I hope you will have the goodness at an early date.....It is highly desirable that this should be prosecuted with all convenient speed,...It is unnecessary for me to offer any remarks on this petition the prayer of which is almost precisely in similar terms to the one covered by my despatch, #47, of February last." (2)

On August 2, of the same year the Council of the North West Territories in legislative session resolved that:-

- (1) Sessional Papers Reports of the Department of the Interior for these years.
- (2) Sessional Papers, 1885, Vol. XVIII, No. 13, paper No. 116, pages 24 to 30.

"Whereas this Council has under consideration a petition of certain halfbreeds and whereas it is not within the power of this Council to grant lands, resolved therefore that the Lieutenant-Governor be requested to forward the petition to the Dominion Government together with the following suggestion which they respectfully but strongly urge may receive the early and earnest attention of His Excellency the Governor General in Council:- that in view of the fact that grants of land or issues of scrip were made to the halfbreeds of Manitoba, there will undoubtedly be general dissatisfaction among the halfbreeds of the Territories unless they receive some like consideration." (1)

The plan which the Council suggested was that non-transferable location tickets be issued to each halfbreed head of a family, and each halfbreed child of parents in the Territories at the time of the transfer to Canada. These tickets were to be valid on any unoccupied lands in the Dominion. The title was to remain vested in the Crown for ten years and if within three years after entry no improvements were made upon the land the claim was to be subject to forfeiture. (2)

The Council, however, received very little attention from the government at Ottawa. In federal politics the Territories had no votes, much less members, so when the Council lifted up its voice on the far banks of the Red River, or further west after 1875, it was truly a voice crying in the wilderness. That the Council had always resented this slight upon itself is evidenced by the resolutions of

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(1) Sessional Papers, 1885, Volume XVIII, No. 13, Paper No. 116, pages 24 to 30.

(2) Ibid, page 24.



protest which it forwarded from time to time, but it accomplished little. (1)

On December 20, 1878, Colonel Dennis, deputy minister of the Interior, submitted to Sir John A. Macdonald some "remarks on the condition of the North West" pointing out that:-

"It is expedient, with as little delay as possible, to deal with the claims to consideration preferred by the halfbreeds of the North West Territories. The immediate effect would be that we would have the whole of this element in sympathy with the government which, in view of the present critical relations of the various tribes of Indians would prove of the greatest value. The undersigned regards the state of affairs in the Territories in relation to the Indians and halfbreeds as calling for the serious consideration of the government. It is the duty of all to do all in their power to prevent misfortune as difficulties increase with delay." (2)

After a lengthy description of affairs as they existed in the west, Dennis supported the plan of the North West Council:-

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- (1) "The North West Council deeply regret that the Privy Council has not been pleased to communicate their approval or disapproval of the legislation and many resolutions adopted by the council at their meetings on September 4, 8, 11, and 13, 1873 or March 11, 12, 14, 16, 1874 or June 1, 2, 1874 and they respectfully represent that such long delay has paralysed the action of the council."

Quoted in Hawkes, John Saskatchewan and Its People, Volume I, page 297.

Again on March 11, 1875, recalling their resolutions of the last session, "the council regret that they have not as yet been advised by His Excellency's pleasure regarding these subjects. They feel that any delay will be attended with unfortunate results. The council are aware that exceptional circumstances may have prevented that prompt action which they trust will in the future characterize the dealings of the Privy Council with the North West affairs."

Quoted in Black, N. F., Op. Cit., page 210.

- (2) Sessional Papers, 1885, Volume XVIII, No. 13, Paper No. 116, page 93 ff.

"The Council of the North West Territories, having given consideration to a memorial signed by 272 halfbreeds of the Cypress Hills, arrived at the conclusion that each halfbreed should receive non-negotiable scrip for 160 acres of land which he should be at liberty to locate on any vacant Dominion lands, but no land should be reserved for that purpose and the patent should not issue for ten years after the selection has been made." (1)

This memorandum was submitted by Dennis to Archbishop Tache, Bishop McLean and Governor Laird for criticism and they all replied quite warmly and expressed satisfaction at the prospect suggested by him. (2) Then he made up a file consisting of his own memorandum and the letters of Tache, McLean and Laird, along with others from Bishop McRae and Col. Richardson and a memorial forwarded by Lawrence Clarke through the North West Council. This complete file he laid before Sir David McPherson, who was acting Minister of the Interior. But nothing came of it.

In 1879, Bishop McLean and Charles Mair of Prince Albert, Rev. McDougal of Morley and Col. Richardson, stipendiary magistrate and member of the North West Council all pressed the claims of the Metis, either in writing or in person, and Ottawa did rouse from its lethargy long enough to pass an act empowering the Department of the Interior to deal with the matter by granting land to such persons to such an extent and on such terms and considerations as may be deemed expedient.

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(1) Sessional Papers, 1885, Vol. XVIII, No. 13, Paper No. 116, page 93ff.

(2) Ibid, page 88ff.

But the wheels of office soon rusted and failed to revolve for no administrative action followed to give effect to this desirable legislation and conditions in the Saskatchewan remained unsatisfactory.

In May, 1880, a petition was forwarded to Sir John A. Macdonald by the halfbreeds of Manitoba Village as was also one by the settlers of Prince Albert accompanied by a letter from Charles MacKay:-

"I hereby forward you a petition from the halfbreeds of Edmonton and Prince Albert. As we have no representative for the North West Territory through whom we could make our wants known, the petition is forwarded direct to you. Trusting that it shall receive your early and special attention." (1)

This petition was signed by 102 names and on May 10, was acknowledged by Russell, the acting Surveyor General. (2) Almost at the same time another petition signed by 16 residents was forwarded to Sir John by Thomas MacKay and was similarly acknowledged. (2)

In September, 1881, the Qu'Appelle settlers led by Peter Lapierre forwarded a memorial with 150 supporting signatures which was duly replied to by Russell. (3) On October 18, 1881, the inhabitants of the district of Lorne held an indignation meeting and persuaded Lawrence Clarke, their member of the North West Council, to forward to Ottawa a resolution which was acknowledged six months later. (4) The same procedure was repeated the following year, (4) and again on October 9,

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(1) Sessional Papers, 1885, Vol. XVIII, No. 13, Paper No. 116, page 41.

(2) Ibid, page 42.

(3) Ibid, page 44.

(4) Ibid, page 68 ff.

1883, the North West Council sent through Dewdney, the Lieutenant-Governor, to His Excellency, the Governor General, a memorial asking that,

"those halfbreeds in the Territories who have not participated in the arrangement to extinguish the halfbreed claim in Manitoba should enjoy the same rights as accorded halfbreeds in that province." (1)

Evidence of this type is almost unlimited. (2) Petition followed petition; delegation succeeded delegation till one would think Ottawa would grant the request just for the sake of silencing the complainants, if for no better reason. But the Metis remained without their grant.

The fear was held by some that if the land grant were made, the recipients would simply sell their scrip for ready cash to speculators as they had done in Manitoba in 1870 and that they would then migrate farther west into the Peace River district. Such was the fear of Robert Jefferson and Father Lacombe, two men in a position to judge wisely. (3) Archbishop Tache feared it when he represented that "till the halfbreeds become more acquainted with civilization it would be wiser not to accede to their demands in this regard." (4) The North West

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(1) Ibid, page 59.

(2) See Sessional Papers regarding petitions through 1883, 1884 and the spring of 1885.

(3) Jefferson, R., Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan, Canadian North West Historical Society Publications, Vol. I., No. 5, page 121.

(4) Reply to Col. Dannis' letter of December 23, 1878, Sessional Papers, 1885, Vol. XVIII, No. 17, Paper No. 116, page 92.

Council and Colonel Dennis, the deputy minister of the Interior, feared it when they suggested the ten year clause if the grant were made.

The fear was well grounded as subsequent events proved. The grants were finally made after the rebellion and in the case of being the head of a family each halfbreed received the right to locate 160 acres of land or \$160 in scrip, good to purchase government lands at current prices, or in the case of being a minor 240 acres of land or \$240. Then ninety per cent elected to take the money value in preference to the land, and of those who took the land the majority soon sold their valuable rights to the speculators who came on the heels of the commission.

This, however, does not seem to have been the reason the government delayed meeting the wishes of the Metis. The fact that it always intended to make the grant (1), that the necessary act was passed in 1879 but not acted on, and that finally the grant was carried through when just too late, (2) indicates that it was carelessness, not positive opposition which delayed the action.

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(1) "No objection to your suggestion to give scrip."  
MacPherson, Minister of Interior, to W. P. R. Street, Chairman of the Halfbreed Commission, Winnipeg, on April 6, 1885, Sessional Papers, 1885, Vol. XVIII, No. 13, paper No. 116, page 3.

(2) "Pray remember that the government determined in January, before there was any disturbance, to appoint commission, and that the halfbreeds were notified thereof on 4th of February."  
MacPherson to Street, April 6, 1885, Ibid., page 3.

"The Government has decided to investigate claims of halfbreeds and has directed enumeration of those who did not participate in the grant under Manitoba Act."  
Telegram from MacPherson, Minister of Interior, to Dewdney, on February 4, 1885. Sessional Papers, Ibid, page 17.

It is difficult to understand why the government was so tardy in carrying out a policy which it obviously contemplated. Moreover, the halfbreeds had no radios in those days, nor telephones, nor even a satisfactory mail service, so news, sent to some official on February 4, could scarcely be expected to stop in three weeks time, a rebellion that had been slowly gathering for three times three years. The halfbreeds had not even heard of the government's decision when the rebellion broke out.

When later the government at Ottawa was being criticized severely from all corners of the Dominion and charged with neglect, the answer was that the real grievances were not great, that many of the halfbreeds had already received lands in Manitoba, and that the rebellion was fomented by disappointed white speculators. But after the charge and defence are examined, the impression remains that there was a lack of vision and foresight in dealing with the situation; for the dispute was about a few acres of land in a country where tens of millions were available and where the government was begging for settlers. But whatever the reason for the delay was, the fact remains that to the Metis the failure to receive the grant was a real cause of deep grievance.

A great variety of criticism was levelled at the government for its handling of this one particular phase of the matter, the critics believing that "the authorities blundered and made haste so slowly" (1) that the "details are not creditable to the Conservative Government for the story was repeated of lethargy and inefficiency". (2) Eastern as well as Western newspapers joined in the protestations.

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(1) MacRae, A. O. Op. Cit., page 397.

(2) Parkin, G. R. Op. Cit., page 239.

"The Metis had good grounds for their grievances. By the Manitoba Act the rights of the halfbreeds of that province to share in the Indian title was granted and it follows that if they had rights in the soil of Manitoba those of them dwelling in the region beyond had rights in the soil there. This admits of no dispute. The records of the day show that the government recognized the point but the department for years has steadily refused to move in the matter. Had they had votes or, if, like the Indian they had been numerous enough to command respect and overawe red tape the wheels of office would have revolved for them. It was a tangled question, would involve no end of trouble; it was a claim that would be none the worse for blue moulding in pigeon holes. Negligence was gross and inexcusable. The department was wrong and should be censured." (1)

"We challenge contradiction of the assertion that it is next to impossible to find a man in the Territories, not dependent on the Government for his bread, who does not speak in the strongest terms of condemnation of the manner in which the affairs of the country have been mismanaged." (2)

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(1) The Toronto Mail, July 8, 1885.

(2) The Manitoba Free Press, April 4, 1885.

Note. For further criticisms of a similar nature see The Calgary Herald, March 18, 1885.  
Deane, Captain Burton, Op. Cit., page 184.

The demand for scrip was but one phase of the troublesome land question; the demand for patents was equally serious. Ever since settling in their new homes along the Saskatchewan, the pioneer halfbreeds had been trying in vain to secure from Ottawa the title deeds for their long narrow farms. Now when they saw the Canadian Pacific Railway nearing the completion of its span across the prairies with the resultant rapid increase of eastern immigration, knowing that in the eyes of the law they were nothing but squatters with no better claims than those of the first occupant, they became more insistent in their demand to receive their land patents.

The desire for deeds of title was acute; the possibility of getting them was remote. There were no land offices in the West and Ottawa was far distant with meagre communication facilities. When the surveyors who were sent out by the Government to survey the land made their returns to Ottawa a land agent was finally appointed, but for some time the land office was not open for business. Not only were the halfbreeds unable to secure their patents but also the new settlers were greatly inconvenienced, having nothing to guide them, for some of the land was marked out in the square system of survey and some--the halfbreed farms-- was still in the long, narrow, rectangular system of river frontage. To overcome this inconvenience Father Andre and Lawrence Clarke, on June 14, 1881 had petitioned the Minister of the Interior, through David Laird, the Lieutenant-Governor of the North



West Territories, praying that "the land office at Prince Albert may be opened for the purpose of entering claims for land". (1) The Deputy Minister replied the same day, saying that the matter would receive attention. (2) Yet nothing was done and on November 19, 1883, thirty residents from St. Louis de Langevin petitioned George Duck, the Land Agent at Prince Albert, who on December 17, forwarded the matter to the Minister of the Interior, pointing out that "Many of us have occupied our lots long enough to entitle us to patents and yet there has been no way, as yet, of getting them entered at your office." (3)

Complaining against these conditions, continuous representation was made to Ottawa both by personal and written petition. Almost all of the petitions previously cited concerning the question of scrip asked likewise for the issue of title deeds but others concerning patents only were sent.

In August 1882, Mr. Dewdney, now the Lieutenant-Governor of the Territories, wrote Sir John Macdonald regarding the Metis claims as follows:

"I would suggest that either Mr. Walsh or Mr. Pearce be instructed to examine into and adjust them without delay as the halfbreeds interested are very uneasy about their holdings and may be looked upon as the pioneers of the district." (4)

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(1) Sessional Papers of 1885, Volume XVIII, No. 13, Paper No. 116 page 96.

(2) Ibid, page 96.

(3) Ibid page 67.

(4) Ibid, page 50.

Later he wrote to Hon. Mr. Macpherson that "the sooner the claims of these halfbreeds are determined the better, as a number of them are bona-fide settlers and deserve consideration." (1) But in spite of this it was not until January 30, 1885, a lapse of almost three years, that "Land Commissioners Walsh and Pearce went to Ottawa to confer with the Minister of the Interior respecting Dominion land matters and to adjudicate upon cases now in dispute." (2)

Even as early as May 17, 1878, the halfbreeds of St. Albert had petitioned the Minister of the Interior through Laird, claiming it to be "of the utmost importance" that the government cause to be surveyed "with as little delay as possible" the lands occupied and cultivated by the halfbreeds and that "patents for said lands be granted them." (3)

As usual the federal authorities paid no attention to "this voice crying in the wilderness" as is evidenced by the statement of the North West Council when on December 18, 1885, it set forth that,

"Knowing as we do the great influence always had over the Indians by the halfbreeds, we have to regret that the repeated representations to the Government of Canada by the North West Council on behalf of the halfbreeds and their claims did not receive more immediate attention." (4)

When Bishop Grandin heard that Riel was again in Canada he visited among the Metis for 15 days and then wrote in September 1884 a formidable letter to the Prime Minister:-

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(1) Ibid, page 80.

(2) Battleford Herald, January 30, 1885.

(3) Sessional Papers, 1885, Volume XVIII, No. 13, Paper 116, page 25.

(4) Quoted in Black, N. F., Op. Cit., page 239.

"I have seen the principal Metis of the place....How many times hav I not addressed my self in letters and conversation to Your Honour without being able to obtain anything but fine words, I have written at their dictation the complaints and demands of these people. I send them to you again under cover with this. I blame the Metis and have not spared them reproaches. But the Canadian Government is not free from blame; and if I had the same authority among its members as I have with the Metis I should tell them so, more respectfully doubtless, but with the same frankness....I implore Your Honour not to be indifferent to this and to act so that this evil may be averted." (1)

Again he wrote to Sir Hector Langevin:-

"Once pushed to the limit they may proceed to acts of extreme violence. I beg you then to instantly employ all your influence to secure for them whatever is just in their demands." (2)

At a meeting of settlers held on April 5, 1885, eight miles out from Calgary, an association was formed, called "The Alberta Settlers' Rights Association". There was a large initial membership; officers were elected, and a strongly worded memorial, signed by over 200 men, demanding the issue of land patents, was forwarded by next mail to Sir John A. Macdonald. At the meeting it was moved that, in case the government refused their demand, they would take up arms and join the halfbreeds. One speaker said that if they were refused they would get behind their winchesters. The president said the only difference between a settler and a wild animal was that the wild animal had a closed season whereas the settler was hunted at all times. (3)

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(1) Quoted in Hughes, Katherine Father Lacombe, The Black Robed Voyageur, page 295.

(2) Ibid, page 296.

(3) Manitoba Free Press, April 7, 1885.

There were many specific cases of individuals actually suffering person hardships through not having title to their land. Examples are to be found in the cases of Pere Andre, Canon Newton and Father Lacombe.

Father Andre held at Duck Lake 200 acres of which he had been in peaceful possession for over seven years. The land was fenced and cost him a good deal of money. He was one of the first settlers and nobody ever troubled him until a man by the name of J. Kelly jumped his claim, and notwithstanding the priest's protestations, claimed the land as his own, and put the frame of a house upon it, depriving Andre in that manner of half his property. (1)

Canon Newton had on his land a beautiful grove of spruce firs in cultivation of which he spent both time and money. In his absence some man took down the fence and felled the trees. When questioned, instead of being ashamed he said he would do as he pleased and would not hesitate to take all the grove away. When Newton complained to the civil authorities, they replied that they had no instructions about crown lands and timber limits and refused to give him protection. There was no law, although there was supposed to be a government. (2)

In 1883 the town site at Calgary was not yet surveyed. Men hurried to grab a plot to make money on town lots. Father Lacombe and Father Doucet claimed not only squatter's rights for the mission

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(1) Pere Andre's Letter to Laird, Sessional Papers, 1885, Vol. XVIII, No. 13, Paper No. 116, page 24.

(2) Newton, Rev. Canon Twenty Years on the Saskatchewan. Quoted in Black, N. F. Op. Cit., page 260.

buildings but, as male citizens of the Dominion, they felt themselves entitled to homesteads; therefore, they selected two quarter sections. Newcomers, however, set up shacks on these sections and although Father Lacombe warned them off, they refused to go. Since the claim could not be registered except at Ottawa, Father Lacombe went there in person and succeeded in obtaining a personal interview with Sir David MacPherson, Minister of the Interior. The latter made him fair promises and told him to come back in a few days for the title deeds which would be ready for him. Father Lacombe, however, blandly told him that a priest was used to camping, and that he would just camp in the Minister's Office until the deeds were ready. Thereupon, he sat down. Sir David immediately wrote out the guarantee of the homestead locations on the sections indicated, promising that the patents for the land would follow when the conditions were fulfilled. (1)

Another man "had squatted in 1873, had entered his land in 1877, had performed settlement duties ever since, but was liable to have it jumped should he leave it for a time." (2) Another had "squatted in 1877, entered his land in 1878 and was in the same predicament." (2) Yet another had been "eight years on his land," had improved it and had good buildings but "could not leave home for any length of time" (2)

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(1) Hughes, Katherine    The Black Robed Voyageur, page 281ff.

(2) Interview with Dr. Bryce    Manitoba Free Press, September 2, 1884.

"Gareau was present at nearly all the meetings held by the settlers of St. Laurent and Batoche during the fall and winter and heard the speeches by Louis Riel and others. The sole object of the promoters was to induce the government at Ottawa to recognize the claims of the settlers and issue patents for their lands. They also asked that grants be made to old settlers who had not received lands in Manitoba. They desired a portion of public lands to be set aside for the support of schools and hospitals. Their chief argument was that the halfbreeds of Manitoba had been well and liberally treated even after joining in the troubles of '69 and '70, while the halfbreeds in the far West had lived quietly and loyally but had never received any recognition of their claims as settlers. They had passed various resolutions and these had been forwarded to Ottawa but without result. Last year the timber inspector came and made them buy permits for all the timber they required. He himself last fall went to Prince Albert land office and complained that others were cutting timber on his claims. The answer he received was that he must protect it himself by force until he obtained his patent when he would have recourse to the law for protection." (1)

Not only were individuals being personally aggrieved by conditions, but the general progress of the country itself was being retarded. Alexander McKenzie when asked his opinion as to the amount of immigration that year into the North West, replied as follows:-

"I have not obtained reliable information but there can be no question it is less than last year. Immigration has been stopped largely from Ontario by reports of complaints coming from the West. Complaints concerning the administration of the land department have undoubtedly had a bad effect upon the country." (2)

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(1) Interview with Louis Gareau, Manitoba Free Press, April 7, 1885.

(2) Manitoba Free Press, September 25, 1884.

The following are typical criticisms levelled at the government for its inefficient handling of the matter:-

"The entire blame for this deplorable uprising rests with the government. They have been warned time and again. They knew they had heaped wrongs on the Saskatchewan settlers. The surveys were delayed. When the land was finally thrown open for entry, settlers who had lived there in some instances for 15 or 20 years found on making application at the office that their holdings had already been disposed of at Ottawa. The Prince Albert land office has been the scene of many a pathetic incident. The poor man's voice has more than once been heard exclaiming, 'My God, what shall I do? My house, my land, my home are gone.'" (1)

"The Dominion Government will now be in a position to see how grave the consequences of the carelessness and mismanagement are likely to be. Upon their heads must be the blood of the men already killed and of those who yet fall. All are now aware that the government will have a terrible responsibility to bear." (2)

"All this because we have a recklessly indifferent, incapable and corrupt government. The Ottawa authorities had full notice that this trouble was coming. They were warned by their friends. Had the title of these people to a few thousand acres of practically valueless land on the Saskatchewan, which they had occupied and cultivated for years, been acknowledged as it should have been, this disaster might have been avoided." (3)

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(1) Manitoba Free Press, March 27, 1885.

(2) Ibid, March 28, 1885.

(3) Ibid, March 30, 1885.

"I find there are a number of halfbreeds here who did not participate in the halfbreed allotment of land in Manitoba and in justice are entitled to their 160 acres free. Then, again, four fifths of them have been on their present holdings for over four years and in many instances have yet to hear from the government if they will get their claims recognized. They are thus debarred from taking advantage of second homesteading privileges. Do not labour under the belief that these matters have not been represented to the authorities. A local influential man, Mr. T. W. Jackson, member of the North West Council, has sympathetically for the past 18 months been trying to secure justice. The government, through the Minister of Public Works was directly made acquainted with the unfair treatment of the halfbreeds. The matter was personally brought before Sir Hector Langevin. The day of reckoning will come for the government and their executive, Mr. Dewdney. No doubt remains in the minds of the best informed here that the Minister of the Interior is responsible for the troubles." (1)

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(1) Free Press Correspondent from Fort Qu'Appelle, Manitoba Free Press, April 8, 1885.



The troublesome land question had yet another phase. In some districts the government was slow in having any survey put through and in those locations where the engineers did mark out the land they used a system quite foreign to the halfbreeds' understanding and wishes. Consequently the fear of being dispossessed of their lands because the government withheld the title deeds was greatly increased in the minds of the Metis when the surveyors sent out by Ottawa began to mark off the land in the square mile and township system, which markings often overlapped the long narrow farms of river frontage held by the halfbreeds. Though the Canadian of to-day may be well enough satisfied with the present method of land subdivision, the Metis who suffered during this period of transition seemed not to be able to understand it all, nor yet could the Indians. Once some survey parties for the Canadian Pacific Railway, together with a geographical survey and a party constructing a telegraph line caused considerable excitement among the Indians who did not understand the actions of the surveyors. A party of natives, observing the white men at work, demanded the meaning and purpose of the survey. Not receiving a satisfactory answer, one of the Indians seized the horse hitched to the front cart, turned it around and started it eastward, and, addressing the surveyors, said, "Go". This peremptory command accompanied by significant gestures, was instantly obeyed. (1) This suspicion was held by Indian and halfbreed alike.

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(1) Maclean, John      McDougall of Alberta, page 97.

On this question as on those concerning scrip and patents, petition followed unanswered petition. In fact, many representations, praying for a speedy remedy of the first two grievances also complained against this third one.

As early as 1877 one hundred and fifty Scotch halfbreeds of Prince Albert petitioned the government to instruct the surveyors to respect the established boundaries of their lands. Their request was granted and the land was surveyed into lots fronting the river. Then, with regard to other districts the Government either took no action, or reversed its decision and decided to use the square survey system. Thus, these other districts felt that they were the victims of inactivity or discrimination. (1)

On January 15, 1878, the French halfbreeds at Prince Albert petitioned the Minister of the Interior, drawing his "attention to the urgent necessity of immediate survey of the lands in this locality".(2) The following month they repeated the petition and received from Dennis, the general surveyor, an acknowledgment of their communication. (3)

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(1) "Sometimes a little was done; the Scotch halfbreeds at Prince Albert were given their river-lot survey but this only emphasized still more the grievance of the French halfbreeds at St. Laurent." Skelton, O. D. Op. Cit., page 289.

(2) Sessional Papers, 1885, Volume XVIII, No. 13, Paper 116, page 24.

(3) Ibid, page 29.

On February 13, the halfbreeds from St. Laurent, claiming "difficulties owing to the absence of surveys" forwarded a similar petition to the Minister through Laird asking for an immediate survey of their lots in the river front system as had been granted to the Scotch halfbreeds at Prince Albert. (1) This petition was acknowledged by the Minister on March 18. (2)

The settlers of St. Louis de Langevin petitioned in 1880, and again in 1883, pointing out that:-

"In the autumn of 1880 we petitioned the Minister of the Interior for a special survey into river lots as was granted to the Prince Albert Settlement. Since that time we have sent more petitions at various times for the same object supporting the same with the influence of Messrs. J. Royal, D. H. Macdonall, L. Clarke and Bishop Grandin. Finally Father Leduc who had been sent to Ottawa as a delegate by the people of Edmonton and St. Albert, showed us the answer of the government promising a special survey. Since then we have waited in vain for the new survey." (3)

On January 19, 1884, Father Vegreville, of St. Louis de Langevin, wrote Mr. A. M. Burgess as follows:-

"I myself have several times got Mr. Duck, D. L. S., of St. Albert to write to Ottawa and in every case without success. In February 1883 Rev. Father Leduc and Mr. Maloney were deputed to set forth our grievances and to present our claims to the government. They were promised, in writing, that the lands we occupy should be surveyed as river lots ten chains in front by two miles in depth and that the survey should be made in the following autumn. The autumn has passed, winter

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(1) Ibid, page 28.

(2) Ibid, page 26.

(3) Ibid, page 67.

"is advancing. What has become of those promises? Be good enough, sir, to consider the consequences of a painful delay. If I were on the spot I could get this letter signed by heads of families representing a population of 2000 souls." (1)

On September 4, 1862, the French halfbreeds at Prince Albert pointed out to the Minister of the Interior that:-

"The surveyed lands being already occupied or sold we were compelled to occupy lands not yet surveyed. Great was our astonishment and perplexity when we were notified that when the lands are surveyed we shall be obliged to pay \$2 an acre to the government if our lands are included in the odd numbered sections. We desire, moreover to keep close together to secure a school and church. We are poor people. In our anxiety we appeal to your sense of justice---that we shall not be disturbed in our lands. Having so long held this land and protected it against the Indians at the price of our blood--we request that the government allow us to occupy our lands in peace, the lots to be surveyed along the river ten chains in width and two miles in length, this mode of division being the long established usage of the country." (2)

To this petition Mr. Lindsay Russell, on behalf of the Minister replied that when the proper time arrived the case of each bona fide settler would be dealt with on its merits, but all the lands would be surveyed according to the square system now in force. (2)

On March 11, 1862, George Duck, the Dominion Lands' Agent at Prince Albert, wrote the Minister stating that the majority of settlers wanted a re-survey of their lands in the river-lot system. (3) Six months later the Minister's secretary replied, stating the government's refusal to re-survey the district and pointing out that the Government intended to retain the square survey system. (3) Why should any capable and

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(1) Quoted in Black, N. F. Op. Cit., page 257.

(2) Sessional Papers, 1865, Vol. XVIII, No. 13, Paper No. 116, page 47.

(3) Ibid, page 46.

energetic administration take six months to acknowledge a letter from one of its officials if it were at all interested in the expressed desires of the people?

The case was again laid before the Minister of the Interior by Father Andre on January 16, 1883 when he stated that:-

"I write you for the purpose of calling your attention to the painfully embarrassing situation in which the French half-breeds settled on the south banks of the Saskatchewan are placed. According to an old custom in Manitoba they took up their lots ten chains wide in front and two miles in depth, trusting that the government would survey these lands into lots ten chains by 2 miles. Their surprise may be imagined when they saw the land along the Saskatchewan measured off into squares of 40 chains without any heed being given to their just claims and protests. Our halfbreeds are overwhelmed with difficulties. This survey lamentably mixes things. Some lose their land which is being grabbed by their neighbours. Already the people of this colony have addressed to you a petition on this subject but the answer given under your directions is not one calculated to inspire hope. I have resolved to make another effort. I dare hope that you will accede to their just requests and no later than next summer to order a new survey of the land." (1)

Similar sentiments were expressed by Louis Schmidt in a letter on April 26, 1884, to the Minister, stating that during the last 4 years petitions upon petitions had been sent to the Department to have lands surveyed in ten or twenty chains frontage by one or two miles long as the same had been done for the Prince Albert settlement on both the north and south branches of the Saskatchewan and regretting that so far these prayers had not been granted nor even an answer of any kind given. (2)

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(1) Ibid, page 54.

(2) Ibid, page 61.

More evidence might be submitted but sufficient has been given to show the falsity of the claim, previously cited, made by Superintendent Pearce when he reported to honourable Mr. White that "not one of the 258 ever lost one inch of land through the system of survey." (1)

In review, then, the land question with its three phases of scrip, patent, and survey formed a triangle of trouble within which the disappointed Metis were gradually driven from a state of uneasiness to one of anger, despair, and finally rebellion.

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(1) See page 41 of text.

There was discontent over the land question not only among the Metis but also among a great many whites, though the cause for the dissatisfaction of the latter group was different from that of their duskier neighbors. The land boom which opened in the west, with its consequent inrush of immigration, scattered people far and wide.

"Auctioneer rooms were a sight to see. Fortunes were made and lost. Great harm was done to the country by all this wild-cat speculation. People got inflated ideas. Many in different parts of the world who were bitten turned against the west and denounced it. In 1890 a lady school teacher in Ireland sent a sum of money to one of my parishioners to pay her taxes on town lots in Pomeroy, and she asked on what street a certain family lived and would he kindly send her a copy of the Pomeroy paper." (1)

Since Pomeroy even to-day is but a rural community five miles distant from the smallest town, it is evident that the boom was, to some people at least, a wild one.

The bubble soon burst for "1883 marked the end of two years of wild speculation" (2) but during that time "paper towns had sprung up and the aftermath of the ill-starred boom caused disappointment and suffering." (2) One reason for its sudden termination was that the Canadian Pacific Railway line was not laid down along the route which was originally planned for it. Many people, in the expectation that the railway was to be built along a northern route, bought land along the projected right of way. When later the route was changed to its present southern location these people found their lands located in an isolated position. (3).

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(1) MacBeth, R. G. The Making of the Canadian West, pages 135 ff.

(2) Black, N. F., Op. cit., page 234.

(3) "The selection of that railway route was a job."  
Manitoba Free Press, April 8, 1885.

These disappointed speculators, hoping to recoup their fortunes by buying up cheap land if the halfbreeds secured scrip, did not hesitate to urge the Metis on to revolt. Even one so prejudiced against Riel as MacBeth, admitted that the former "was urged on, as it was locally known, by unprincipled whites who expected to profit by open hostilities." (1) These hungry partisans who marked the new and defenceless country as their perquisite were behind the movement which led to the delegation going to Montana to invite Riel north but they took good care to work under cover and to destroy the evidence of their guilt.

"In this agitation it was notorious that the prominent men took the lead. The halfbreeds were abetted by the whole population. This scheme (of getting Riel from the United States) if it did not originate from the whites, at least had their secret approval. Isbister, a Scotch halfbreed, and one of those delegated to visit Riel, would not be satisfied with 'sub rosa' backing and would not go until he had obtained from a very prominent man a letter giving him some sort of authorization for the mission." (2)

As this is the statement of the Indian agent who had been, was, and continued to be in the very heart of the rebellious communities it may be considered as reflecting accurately the selfish and guilty complicity of this white element; but further incriminating evidence is available.

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(1) MacBeth, R. G. Romance of Western Canada, page 249.

(2) Jefferson, Robert Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan, Canadian North West Historical Association Publications, Volume I, No. 5, page 121.



"Honore Jaxon (Henry Jackson) the young Ontario aide of the Metis and graduate of Toronto University joined Riel on Riel's arrival in Canada. Jackson stated to me in Edmonton in October, 1909 that Isbister and Dumont brought Riel letters from leading white men among the old timers and business men of Saskatchewan urging him to come back to curb the ambitions of the newcomers and to secure the rights of his own people. These letters Jaxon saw burned at Prince Albert at the close of the rebellion before he fled to the United States and freedom. A prominent statesman of Western Canada also informed me that he knew of those letters held by Jaxon and burned by a relative of the latter at Prince Albert in order that the writers might not be compromised should an investigation be held." (1)

As this is the story of a reliable priest who was closely associated with both sides before, during, and after the rebellion, one cannot help but feel the weight of the evidence. The same priest believed that a relatively large number of white men were interested in the movement, urging on the more ignorant Metis in the rebellion in order that the country might be flooded with negotiable scrip for out of this the Saskatchewan man of affairs might hope to make a fortune as easily as his prototype of the Red River had done. (2) The police knew that the Metis were being influenced through the wiles of the land grabbers and that they mistrusted the lieutenant-governor of the Territories, Mr. Dewdney, believing him to be "much in the hands of an unscrupulous clique." (3)

This white agitation evidently spread westward into the Saskatchewan from Manitoba, the Free Press of that province claiming that although

"we do not charge the Manitoba agitators with being directly responsible for what has already proved a bloody insurrection, we are convinced that but for the wild and angry excitement these men have created in Manitoba the events now happening in the Saskatchewan valley would not have occurred." (4)

(1) Hughes, Katherine Father Lacombe the Black Robe Voyageur, page 294.

(2) Ibid, page 294.

(3) Haydon, A. L. The Riders of the Plains, page 122.

(4) Manitoba Free Press, April 7, 1885.

With regard to this unrest in Manitoba it might be pointed out that the Farmers Union of that province, anxious concerning local matters irrelevant to the present topic, had been agitating for some time, to what extent appears in a letter written by one of the malcontents to the secretary of the Union:-

"I think there has not been a better time to strike. Seven eighths of the people of Winnipeg are in our favour. Four hundred good men will accomplish our purpose. We had a small meeting tonight and were unanimous in making a strike at once. If we delay we will be only losing ground. Would like to know the possible number of men who can be got from the country to assist in the scheme. I hope you will come to some definite conclusion at your council meeting. Let me hear from you. Mack Howe, J. G." (1)

With the expectation of sympathy and possibly even more tangible help from these false friends, with conditions becoming more and more intolerable as Ottawa's procrastination continued, and with the knowledge that slight action and show of violence in Manitoba in 1870 had shaken the desired action out of the government, the Metis rebelled and carried themselves further than they intended actually to go.

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(1) Sessional Papers, 1886, Vol. XIX, No. 12, Paper 43.

Yet another grievance which tended to cause the insurrection lay in the fact that the North West Territories Act of 1875 failed to make any provision for western representation in the Dominion Parliament. This lack was deeply felt by at least some of the western people who frequently complained of it to Ottawa but not until as late as 1885 was any attempt to remedy the grievance made. In that year a private member's bill was brought in by Mr. Cameron, member for Huron, Ontario, to give the west its fair proportion of representation but the bill was defeated by vote in the House. (1) The protest of the west at this defeat was strongly voiced from all sections of the country.

"Mr. Cameron's bill providing for the representation of the Northwest in the Dominion House of Commons has apparently been killed by the government. The present deplorable troubles are but the natural outcome of the government's methods of treating the people of the Northwest. Instead of endeavoring to ascertain the requirements of the country, that everything possible might be done for its assistance, it appears to be their constant aim to know as little as possible. The representations of settlers and friends of the country have been uniformly disregarded. Those who tendered information or advice have been insultingly told to mind their own business. So it has gone on, the government wilfully blind, the officials insolently despoiling the people and mismanaging their affairs. Had the Northwest had representation in the House as it was entitled to, its representatives would have been able to bring its complaints and grievances up in a way that the government would not have dared to disregard." (2)

The fact that this grievance was remedied immediately after the rebellion when in 1886 a Bill was passed giving the Territories four members in the federal House of Commons is but another proof of the government's procrastination.

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(1) Black, N. F. *Op. Cit.*, page 237.

(2) The Manitoba Free Press, March 25, 1886.

Such a state of uneasiness, suspicion, excitement and despair could not have arisen had the settlers had implicit faith in the officials who had charge of the affairs of the country. But, laboring as the settlers did, under hardships, disappointments and privations, the people were only too ready to believe--sometimes without much cause but more often with considerable--that they had been the dupes of governmental societies or were the prey of official schemesters.

No less a person than Archbishop Tache protested that some officials were very unfit for the positions they held and that,

"their ignorance might have been less complete if the information offered had been listened to. They knew little or nothing of what they needed to know. The government colonization societies had published pamphlets on the country and its advantages. Many looked forward to this country as the promised land. People came west. The country was not prepared for them. Fatigue, loneliness, disappointments and real faults disposed people to credit imaginary wrongs. The fortune dreamt of was not forthcoming. Then came the early frosts. Oh, without saying it openly the people acted as if they thought the authorities responsible for them. No revolt against authority was intended but an evolution of some kind was wanted. It was not considered that in sowing the wind they would reap the whirlwind." (1)

Sometimes "local government officials were party hacks" (2) intent on securing appointments but not so eager to assume the responsibilities involved. In February 1879 some Indian agents were appointed in the East but by August 9, not a single one had put in an appearance in the West. (3).

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(1) Tache, Archbishop, December 7, 1885, quoted from Hopkins G. (Ed.) Canada--An Encyclopaedia of the Country, Volume Iv, page 474.

(2) Parkin, G. R. Op. Cit., page 474.

(3) Black, N. F. Op. Cit., page 201.

To appoint eastern men as Indian agents was in itself a serious mistake. Local newspapers criticised Ottawa for appointing these men instead of western men familiar with conditions. (1) At a meeting held in the summer of 1864, the Metis themselves resolved that,

"the French and English natives of the Northwest (those that have not participated in the Manitoba land grants) want free patent for the land they possess and occupy at the present time; that the management of Indian agencies, instructorships or other offices for the benefit of the Indians in the North West Territories be entrusted to natives as they are more familiar with the habits, character and wants of those Indians; that the French and English natives, knowing that Louis Riel has made a bargain with the Government of Canada in 1870 which said bargain is contained mostly in what is known as the Manitoba Act, and this meeting, not knowing the contents of the said Act, we have thought it advisable that a delegation be sent to Louis Riel and have his assistance to bring all the matters referred to in the above resolutions in a proper shape and form before the government of Canada so that our just demands be granted." (2)

Mr. W. Pearce visited Prince Albert, Battleford and other places and settled many complaints, but he could not speak French and he did not have an interpreter; so there was no enquiry into halfbreed grievances. Then, Mr. A. M. Burgess, deputy Minister of the Interior, made an official visit but broke an arm and cut his visit short. (3) Comment is scarcely necessary as guilt is clearly evident. How could the half-breeds have faith that these officials had Metis interests at heart?

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(1) The Calgary Herald, March 18, 1865.

(2) Quoted in Black, N. F. Op. Cit., page 258.

(3) Black, N. F. Op. Cit. page 238.

No matter how one looks at this question great blame must be attached to the government. If it had weak officials "unfit for their position" and mistrusted by the people it should have recalled them or must take the responsibility for their actions; if these weaklings did not keep the government fully informed of the growing discontent in the North West surely enough must have leaked through in the form of direct petitions, letters and personal protestations to have aroused Ottawa from its inert procrastination. At least one can find no valid excuse for the Minister of State saying in a public address on June 6, 1885, that:-

"If the halfbreeds had serious complaints against the Canadian Government the ordinary method of petition was open to them as to every free citizen. They have not availed themselves of it." (1)

Knowing the multiplicity of approaches made to the government on behalf of the North West and the variety of sources through which these were made, it is impossible to believe that a few incapable officials could have blinded the eyes of Ottawa from a sufficient understanding of the situation to have caused it to follow a new and enlightened policy in the matter. Great weight, therefore, must be attached to the following criticisms:-

"No one will be found to deny that the Dominion Government are directly to blame. They are to blame for the discontent of the halfbreeds whose claims they have treated with scorn. The government have preferred to accept the reports of their own creatures and dependents, rather than accept the word of others who know the truth and tell it. It has been quite evident to those who cared to see that trouble has been brewing in the district for some time. The government have been often enough warned of it. Yet when the outbreak occurs, they are utterly unprepared for it." (2)

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(1) Ibid, page 263.

(2) Manitoba Free Press, March 24, 1885.

"When Sir Hector Langevin returned from his trip through the Northwest last summer he asserted that he had met only two dissatisfied men in the country. It is unnecessary to remind the intelligent public that Sir Hector saw nothing that was not visible from the windows of his special car and heard nothing that was not to the liking of the government officials who accompanied him. In this respect Sir Hector was not different from other members and advisers of the government who have from time to time visited us. They insisted on believing the apid retainers; they rushed through the country with blind-  
ed eyes, closed ears and prejudiced minds, going back to Ottawa to report that smiling peace sat enthroned in the hearts of the people of this country. A greater miracle than that of the loaves and fishes must have been performed to transform two dissatisfied settlers in the course of a few months into a rebel army." (1)

Lieutenant Governor Dewdney in particular was fiercely denounced and the following quotations show the degree of actual hatred which lay behind the accusations.

"There is not a man in the Northwest who knows anything of that gentleman's career as Lieutenant Governor and Indian Commissioner who is not convinced that it is anything but creditable. He has lost no opportunity of making money at the country's expense. His friends have got fat contracts. He has used public money to enhance the value of his private property. He has played the land game with loaded dice. He has wronged and deceived the Indians by wronging and deceiving the government. Sir John A. Macdonald has the assurance of the whole people of the Northwest that Mr. Dewdney is distasteful to them. He has been entreated by his own friends to remove him. He has been told of his misdeeds yet the premier coolly remarks from his place in parliament that, 'I am satisfied with Mr. Dewdney. He is one of the best appointments I have ever made'." (2)

"Could anything be more appropriate than to present him with a petition to leave, to get out, to go elsewhere and teach other Indians and other white men the ethics of grab, greed and shamelessness he has introduced here. Will the government not now at last come to the rescue of the Northwest and choke him off?" (3)

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(1) Manitoba Free Press, April 4, 1885.

(2) Ibid, March 26, 1885.

(3) Winnipeg Times, January 5, 1885.

"The Redmen in the Northwest have substantial grievances. They are deprived of their hunting grounds and their buffalo. The Indian problems can never be solved by mere speculators like Lieutenant Governor Dewdney." (1)

"Lieutenant Governor Dewdney acknowledges that he knew the half-breeds had been holding meetings during the winter with a view to rising and that as a result of the meetings the breeds were gathering, and yet according to his own confession he did not take the trouble to find out what line of action they proposed adopting. By this has he not acknowledged his own utter unfitness for his position?" (2)

"The unfortunate troubles in the Northwest have been brewing for a long while; white settlers as well as the Indians and half-breeds have good cause for complaint. If the government at Ottawa would recall Mr. Dewdney and appoint Hon. A. G. B. Bannatyne and take his advice the grievances would disappear." (3)

"The following resolution was put before a meeting held at Wolseley last week, called to form a home guard, 'That it is the opinion of the meeting that the government should issue orders to hang Riel to the first tree when he is caught; but if there must be delay, that it shall only be long enough to capture Dewdney and hang the two together.' The chairman refused to put the motion but when it was seconded he was forced to do so and it was carried." (4)

"It was decided to move the Indian Agency, storehouse, and several other buildings away from Battleford and locate them on Pound-maker's reserve. As soon as this became generally known a meeting of the residents of Battleford was called to protest. Strong resolutions were adopted, and a petition, signed by almost the whole population, is to be sent to Ottawa. It is probable, however, that this will have no effect. Doubtless, Mr. Dewdney has a homestead 'town-site' which has to be 'boomed'." (5)

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- (1) Sieveright, Rev. J., of Prince Albert, writing in the Canada Presbyterian, March 5, 1885.
  - (2) The Fort Qu'Appelle Vidette, April 2, 1885.
  - (3) Correspondent signing himself "Northwester", Manitoba Free Press, March 23, 1885.
  - (4) The Manitoba Free Press, April 7, 1885.
  - (5) Ibid, March 27, 1885.



"The feeling here is very strong against Dewdney who is blamed for causing all the trouble by representing to the government in a false light how matters stood in the Northwest with regards to the halfbreeds and the doings of Riel." (1)

Remembering the report made by Superintendent Pearce to Mr. White, Minister of the Interior, previously mentioned (2) and reading the above quotations, one is inclined to agree with the historian who wrote about "the gross inaccuracy of many of the official reports" and to give credence to the imputation when he said:-

"I have deliberately omitted some episodes because the reverse of creditable to officials who used the distresses of their country to selfish, pecuniary advantage. The names of many of these contemptible parasites are well known but let their names pass into merciful oblivion." (3)

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(1) Ibid, April 3, 1885.

(2) See page 40, of this text.

(3) Black, N. F. Op. Cit., Vol. II, page 565.

Putting aside the disappointed white settlers, who sympathised with the halfbreed cause up to the point of armed rebellion; omitting the angry white land speculator, and speaking only of the Metis, there was yet another cause for the uprising. By some writers this is called the "war of race and religion". The halfbreeds on the banks of the Saskatchewan and the Government on the banks of the St. Lawrence were indeed far apart not only in point of distance. Greater chasms than could be measured in miles lay between them.

"During Riel's trial and imprisonment there sprang up a war of race and religion, Ontario versus Quebec, English versus French, Protestant versus Catholic a sad spectacle, presenting to the world the Dominion divided against itself." (1)

Though this is true, the origin of the war had an earlier date, and the feeling was not confined to Ontario and Quebec.

The Metis had a keen sense of pride in their race and religion and were quick to notice slights by English Protestants. Archbishop Tache in sympathy with the halfbreeds up to the point of armed rebellion, claimed that:-

"The Metis were not given consideration. General Wolseley had styled them, 'banditti and cowards', and this stupid assertion was often repeated. Instead of treating them as gentlemen treat everyone, they were met in too many instances only with roughness and insolence. A rude and scornful, 'I don't speak French,' was often the only answer to be obtained to legitimate requests." (2)

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(1) McLean, John McDougall of Alberta, page 154.

(2) Tache, Archbishop, December 7, 1885, quoted from Hopkins C. (Ed.), Canada-An Encyclopaedia of the Country., Vol. IV., page 474.

One westerner whose name appears on several of the petitions forwarded to Ottawa believed that the principal cause of the insurrection was the ferment of animosity, if not of hatred, in the hearts of the Metis after the refusal of the federal government to keep its solemn promises to M. Tache and Father Richot regarding the amnesty to the pretended rebels of the Red River in '69 and '70, and because of the bad treatment inflicted upon several Metis by the Ontario volunteers on their arrival at Fort Garry, such as the drowning of Elxear Goulet and other injuries. (1)

Though that belief is somewhat exaggerated, it is no doubt true that while the rebellion was the immediate result of prolonged neglect on the part of Ottawa officials and of gross errors of judgment on the part of others in the Territories, it arose in a considerable measure from racial and religious cause. (2)

Riel later, made much use of this religious background for when he was exhorting and encouraging the Metis to continue their enterprise in arms he appealed to them strongly, from the standpoint of religion.

"To an extent the insurrection was a religious, rather than a political movement. The halfbreeds were to a large extent simply a group of misled religious fanatics. Riel gradually alienated them from the priesthood, imbuing these simple people with the idea that they and he were specially called by God to effect not merely a political but a religious reformation." (3)

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- (1) Schmidt, Louis, July 30, 1923, quoted in Hawkes, John, Op. Cit. page 278.
- (2) For further argument in support of this view see Black, N. F., Op. Cit., pages 567 ff.
- (3) Ibid, page 577.

Due in general, then, to the withholding of scrip and patents, to the square system of survey, to the urging of the disgruntled white speculator, to the lack of representation in the federal government, to their mistrust of officials and to the vague but potent jealousies of race and religion, the Metis thought that the new civilization, of which they had many bitter, but few pleasant, recollections, was about to rob them once more of their ancient rights and privileges. Feeling that they had at least the sympathy of the white settlers and confidently expecting that they would have the armed support of the Indians, the halfbreeds in their own minds fanned this disaffection which, like a spark in inflammable material, spread with amazing rapidity and far-reaching consequences followed in quick succession. But they alienated the sympathy of the whites with the first bloodshed and they failed to secure much support from the Indians due to the latter's respect for and fear of, the Mounted Police and their reverence for the missionaries, as well as to what might be called "the brighter side of the Indian question" namely the seven treaties which the government had entered into with the various tribes.

## The Signing of the Treaties

Since the revolting Metis were joined by a goodly number of their red cousins upon whom much depended, a short description of the Indian situation is here included among "the causes of the rebellion."

In the early 80's the population of the redmen was about 30,000. This is just an approximation for the figure is variously reported. There was no census taken and in any case disease and starvation decimated the tribes so fast that accuracy would be impossible. (1)

Knowing that the government's attitude towards the Metis reflected little that was creditable to Ottawa, one turns with relief to the Indian situation, for here, though there is the dark and gloomy side, one finds a redeeming feature, namely the foresight shown in the government's policy of treaty making and the promptitude with which the policy was carried out.

In all, seven treaties were concluded and may be summarized as follows:-

Date	Location	Population	Area	Made by
1871	Province of old Manitoba	3270	-----	Simpson
1871	Lake Manitoba, Souris, Moose Mountain	2185	-----	Simpson
1873	Lake of the Woods, Rainy River and north	2673	55,000 sq. miles	Morris
1874	Lake Winnipeg to CYPRESS Hills	5886	75,000 sq. miles	Morris and Laird

- (1) The census of 1890 placed the Indian population in Manitoba and the North West Territories at 25,743, (only estimated) and the government table for 1895 gives the red population as 23,683.

"The total number of Indians within the limits of these treaties was 27,124 and the annuities for rationing and educating them over \$750,000."

Laird, Hon. David

Our Indian Treaties, Winnipeg 1905.

Date	Location	Population	Area	Made by
1875	Lake Winnipeg and Saskatchewan River	3183	100,000 sq. miles	Morris
1876	Crees of Upper Saskatchewan	6622	120,000 sq. miles	Morris
1877	Black Feet of Bow River	7681	35,000 sq. miles	Laird
Total Population		32,500	(1)	

The government had been advised to carry out these treaties, the Northwest Council on September 8, 1873, having memorialised Ottawa to the effect that to defer the negotiations of a treaty with the Indians would be attended with unfortunate results. Future events proved the value of these seven pacts, the main terms of which must now be briefly stated. (2)

By these treaties the Indians were promised reserves which were to be chosen by the government agent and the band themselves. The reserves were granted on the basis of one section to each Indian family of five, but the land belonged to the band as a whole, not to the individual. Moreover, at the time of the treaty the government paid \$12 to each male member of the band, and annually thereafter \$5 to each man, woman and child. Each head chief received yearly \$25 and each subordinate chief \$15. In addition the Indians were to have the right to fish and hunt on all the unoccupied land of the district; ammunition and twine to the value of \$1500 were to be granted them annually; one yoke of oxen, one bull, four cows and seed grain for all the broken land were to be pro-

(1) Morris, A. *Treaties of Canada with the Indians of the North West Territories*, Chapters IV to X.  
Bryce, Rev. G. V., Hopkins, C. (Ed.) *Canada—An Encyclopaedia of the Country*, Vol. I, page 225.

(2) For fuller information concerning these treaties see Morris, A., *Op. Cit.*, *Passim*.

vided to each band. One plough to each ten families as well as other agricultural tools and implements were likewise promised. Schools were to be erected on each reserve. No liquor was to be sold. Smaller articles such as suits of official clothing for the chiefs and head men, British flags, silver medals, tobacco and trinkets were also given as tokens and gifts.

The signing of these treaties was carried out always under interesting, sometimes under dangerous, circumstances. For instance in 1876 when Commissioners Governor Morris, Hon. W. J. Christie, and James McKay came to Fort Carlton to negotiate Treaty Six with Mistawasis, the great chief of the Crees, and his friend Ahtukahcoop, Chief Beardy, who later became a rebel, threatened to waylay them and prevent them from crossing the South Saskatchewan River to Carlton and he actually set out with a band of his Indians to do so; but the mounted police, led by Colonel Walker received word of the plot and made themselves a third party to the intended ambushade. Chief Beardy showed no hostility; in fact, he shook hands with the governor but would not sign the treaty except in his own camp. Treaty Six was duly made at Carlton between the aforementioned participants with a noted halfbreed Peter Erasmus, acting as interpreter.

Again on September 19, 1877, at the Blackfeet Crossing of the Bow River, 100 miles from Fort MacLeod, Governor Laird and Colonel MacLeod met the chiefs of the Blackfeet, Blood, Piegan, Stony and Sarcee tribes and 5000 of their men, women and children. There Governor Laird made a stirring appeal to the Indians, explained the terms of the treaty, and asked the Indians to go to their Council tents to consider the matter. Next day another meeting took place and on the third day Treaty Seven was

consummated, Chief Crowfoot and Chief Red Crow making speeches of loyalty.

These treaties constitute the bright side of the government's policy toward the Indians for they were later an important factor in keeping many bands loyal and quiet at a time when a general Indian uprising would have meant untold bloodshed.

But in spite of the treaty regulations the precarious life of the Indians was fast becoming more uncertain and the natives, as civilization advanced, became restless due to disease and starvation.



One phase of the dark and gloomy side of the Indian question was that concerning the disease of small pox. When and how this disease first began to make inroads on the Indian will probably remain unknown but there seems to be something in the redman's constitution which makes him very susceptible to the dread and fatal malady. The Indians themselves believed that the white man had brought it to them and extreme bitterness was aggravated by the belief throughout the Saskatchewan that the Blackfeet had been deliberately subjected to the infection from small pox by Missouri traders. (1) Sir W. F. Butler, who was sent by the Canadian Government through the Indian territory in 1871 to survey and report on the smallpox situation pointed out in his official memorandum that "Monstrous though this opinion may appear, it has been somewhat verified", (2) and gave graphic and pathetic descriptions of the deplorable conditions caused by the disease. Father Lacombe in his letter to Bishop Tache (3) likewise gave terrible descriptions of the deaths caused. Rev. John MacLean, missionary to the Indians, refers to the ravages of the plagues of 1781, 1820, 1838, 1858, 1862, 1865, 1869 and 1880. A stoney Indian said of Banff,

"It was a grave yard and the crying went up both night and day. In some places the Indians blamed the white men for bringing the disease into the country." (4)

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(1) Black, N. F. Op. Cit., page 156.

(2) Butler, Sir W. F. The Great Lone Land, page 359, (Official report printed in appendix to his book.)

(3) Dominion Sessional Papers, 1871, Vol. IV., No. 5, pages 20 to 46.

(4) MacLean, John Op. Cit., page 37.

Even if this disease may not rightly be laid at the door of the white man, the Indian thought it could be, as was pointed out by certain Mandan Chief when he said, "The white people came; they brought with them some good, but they brought also the smallpox." (1)

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(1) Burpee, L. J. (Ed.) Canadian Eloquence, A speech by a Mandan Chief.  
(No pagination)

Note: To cope with the smallpox situation in Saskatchewan, a Board of Health was created in 1871 but did not seem to be able to check the disease.

The Indian blamed the white man, not only for the appearance in his midst of the smallpox from which he died in misery and pain, but also for the disappearance from his country of the buffalo from which he secured his food and raiment. Railway coaches and buffalo herds could not both claim the prairies as their domain and as civilization advanced, the buffalo retreated; as the white man increased, the bison decreased. Whether this was accomplished with deliberate malice of forethought on the part of the whites, as claimed by Colonel Herchner, Sir W. F. Butler and others (1), in an attempt to exterminate the Indians need not be argued. The fact is more important than the motive. The Indians all realized the fact and most of them believed the motive.

This disappearance of the buffalo took place approximately within the decade preceding the rebellion and pathetic indeed are the reports of the missionaries concerning the effects it had upon the Indians. (2)

Butler, reporting on his official tour of the west in 1870-71, said that,

"I have traversed the plains from the Red River to the Rocky Mountains without seeing even one animal upon 1200 miles of prairie. The Indian is not slow to attribute this lessening of his principal food to the presence of the white settlers, whose active competition for pemmican has led to this all but extinction of the bison." (3)

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(1) Butler, W. F. Op. Cit., page 241.  
Herchner, Col. as quoted in MacRae, A. O. Op. Cit., page 377.

(2) For typical examples of such reports see:-  
MacLean, John, Op. Cit., pages 37, 47, and 55.  
Father Lacombe quoted in Hughes Katharine, Op. Cit., page 243.  
Cochin, Rev. L. Missionnaire et Indiens--Canadian North West  
Historical Society Publications, 1927, Vol. I.,  
No. 2.

(3) Butler, W. F. Op. Cit., page 358.

The Fort MacLeod export of buffalo robes in 1877 was 30,000; in 1878, 13,000 but in 1879 only 5,764. The Fort Walsh export in 1878 was 18,253 but in 1879 it was only 8,617. (1) The Blackfeet chiefs sent a message to princess Louise, the Governor General's consort saying, "Our people are starving; do help us for some of us have nothing to eat. Too many other people eat our buffalo." (1)

The federal government was aware of this condition in the west for as early as 1877, J.C. Schultz (afterwards Sir John Schultz), speaking in the House of Commons said that it was clearly the duty of the government to see that this game should be preserved against wholesale slaughter and inevitable destruction. (2) Donald Smith (later Lord Strathcona) supported him but nothing was done. The government seemed content to let the bison be killed off, Sir John A. Macdonald reporting to the Governor General in 1883 that,

"It must not be forgotten that there is still a considerable number of Indians who have not been weaned from the roving life of the plains and who apparently cherish the hope—a forlorn one though it may be—that the buffalo may yet return in sufficient numbers to afford them subsistence." (3)

Protagonists of the federal administration argue that only those Indians who would not sign treaties with the government and go on reserves were suffering this privation; that treaty Indians were being well cared for by the officials of the Indian department. But the facts of the case do not support this view.

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(1) Black, N. F. Op. cit., page 199.

(2) Canada House of Commons Debates, 1877.

(3) Sessional Papers, 1883, Vol. XVI, No. 4, Report of Department of Indian Affairs, page 10.

"We are within two days of treaty payments and no money yet, nor any word of it; the treaty goods are not within 250 miles while the Indians are all at the appointed places and without food. If any trouble arises it will be wholly due to the criminal negligence of the Indian authorities at Ottawa." (1)

"Restlessness of Indians at Duck Lake. Chief Beardy made demands which, if refused, he and his warriors would take from Fort Carlton and Duck Lake such provisions as they might require and they informed their missionary, Father Oudré, that, much as they would regret having to strike their father, he would have to go with the rest." (2)

"On February 20, 1884, word came to Superintendent Herchmer at Regina of trouble at Crooked Lake, near Broadview, 80 miles east of Regina. 60 or 70 Indians had broken into the government storehouse, threatened the life of Mr. Keith, a farm instructor and stolen 70 bags of flour, also bacon and other things. Captain Deane and ten men were sent to investigate. Herchmer and ten more men followed the next day. Several parleys were held. Once the Indians put their guns in the faces of the police and dared them. Finally four Indians, Yellow Calf, Kanawaos, Moise and Penni-pa-ke-sis consented to go to Regina for trial as being the ringleaders. At Regina the trial took place on February 28, before Colonel Richardson magistrate. Mr. A. E. Forget, (now Senator), clerk of the Legislative Assembly, appeared on behalf of the Indians. The Indians were convicted and discharged on suspended sentence." (3)

"I was in charge of the Hudson's Bay Company's trading post on the Crooked Lake reserve for some years prior and subsequent to 1884 troubles. The reducing of rations from time to time to practically nothing in the hard winter of 1884 when there were no rabbits nor anything else to hunt for food brought these Indians face to face with actual starvation. In some cases children died of starvation during that month, their mothers not being able to suckle them due to their weakened condition. Mr. Reed further instructed Mr. Keith to reduce rations still lower. I asked Mr. Keith for God's sake not to reduce rations any lower or there certainly would be trouble. He carried out Mr. Reed's instructions, a few more died, the Indians came and asked for grub, which they were denied, broke into the government storehouse, threw out as much flour and bacon as they wanted, and threw Mr. Keith out on top of it. I ran up from my store in time to save Keith's life, took him away from them and told him what a foolish mistake he had made. After they divided up the flour they all came to my store very excited but

(1) The Calgary Herald, August 11, 1879.

(2) Ibid, January 27, 1879.

(3) Deane, Captain Burton Mounted Police Life in Canada, page 140.

"offered me no violence. I gave them what they wanted, tea, tobacco, sugar, rice and currants, and they all went their way to prepare the feast. It was fortunate for the Mounted Police that day that the Indians had had a good feast so that their tempers were somewhat cooled off by their stomachs being full, or there would not one of you ever have come out of that valley alive." (1)

"I sent messengers through the camps of the Bloods to call the Indians together. I gave them an account of what was going on and advised them to remain quiet on the reserves. They had many complaints to make that they had not enough to eat. I promised them more food of which I saw they were much in need. I instructed the agent to increase the rations of beef. I visited the Blackfeet and found them more excited than the Bloods. They also complained of not having enough food so I increased their rations." (2)

"All of them are actually gone with famine. One young buck, naturally a strong, healthy lad, had an arm no thicker than my wrist. He told me had had nothing to eat for five days except a little fish. If the poor devils depend on fish at this season (February) for food they have little to depend on." (3)

Not only the treaty, as well as the non-treaty Indians, were suffering from starvation but also many of the Metis were in a pitiable condition of privation. Louis Legarre, who lived at Wood Mountain, 90 miles south east of Regina went to Regina in March, 1885, to represent to the Lieutenant Governor that a large number of halfbreeds in his district were in a starving condition and wished to remain where they were so as not to be implicated in the rebellion and that they would be glad of any employment to keep the wolf from the door. (4)

Many witnesses testify to the crop failures of '83 and the hard winters of '83 and '84. The Calgary Herald reported that in '85 the half-

(1) Mr. McKenzie, an eye witness, quoted in Deane, Capt. Burton, Op. Cit. page 150.

(2) Denny, Captain The Riders of the Plains, page 69.

(3) Stinson, F., an old timer in Southern Alberta, quoted in MacRae, A. O., Op. Cit., page 417.

(4) Deane, Captain Burton, Op. Cit., page 22.

breeds "had a bad season" and were "hungry". (1) Lawrence Clarke wrote the Minister of the Interior that the "halfbreeds are getting poorer year by year." (2)

It may be argued that the disappearance of the buffalo was inevitable. There is much truth expressed in the following statement:-

"What would thrifty farmers do if buffalo were still wandering in thousands over their wheatfields and vegetable patches? The buffalo is no doubt a very interesting animal but Manitoba can manage to worry along without any more of him than Warden Bedson can conveniently put up at the penitentiary. Advancing civilization is an uncompromising monster. It destroys picturesque landscapes, tears up green swards, and tramples the flower of the prairie under foot. If we have limpid streams we cannot have factories; if we have picturesque buffaloes we cannot have thriving settlements. We cannot eat our cake and keep it." (3)

Even if this be true, when the inevitable extinction of the bison came the government should have seen to it that the Indian had some means of securing a substitute for the standard daily diet; but the opposite occurred.

Some officials either did not appreciate the seriousness of the situation or else deliberately made light of it. Eight months before the rebellion, Governor Dewdney spoke about "the exaggerated reports on Indian difficulties" and assured his government that the Indians were "generally more contented" than they had been and that the general feeling was "one of security". (4)

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(1) The Calgary Herald, March 18, 1885.

(2) Sessional Papers, 1885, Vol XVIII, No. 13, Paper No. 116.

(3) Manitoba Free Press, October 20, 1884.

(4) Sessional Papers, 1885, Vol. XVIII, No. 13, Paper No. 116.

These "exaggerated reports" came chiefly from the missionaries and the police for certainly not many Indian agents reported serious difficulties. Although showing a few reports such as that sent in by W. Anderson, the Indian Agent at Edmonton when he said,

"The past winter has been a very severe one and the Indians suffered much from want of tents, clothing and shoes; this is owing to the scarcity of buffalo." (1)

The Sessional Papers of '83 and '84 contain many statements leading to the belief that Indian affairs were tranquilly following a natural course. Why should the official reports of the government agents as contained in the government's official records differ so radically from the evidence of the priests and police unless there were some foundation for the statement, previously made, that "local government officials were party hacks intent on securing appointments", but not so eager to report unsatisfactory conditions which might cause their recall or dismissal? Though some officials were evidently sincere men, such as Anderson of Edmonton or Tom Quinn, martyr of the Frog Lake massacre, many others were "easterners who were totally unfit for their positions".

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(1) Sessional Papers, 1885, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, page 136.



## The Invitation and Acceptance

The malcontents, some of whom began to hold secret meetings, (1) lacked a capable, energetic leader. Feeling that they could not do better than place themselves under the guidance of the man who, a few years previously, had so successfully championed their rights, who had secured for them then 240 acres of land each and had set up government among them, they sent a deputation consisting of Gabriel Dumont, Moise Guillette, Michael Dumas and James Isbister in the summer of 1884 on the long 700 mile journey to Montana with the purpose of persuading Louis Riel, the ex-Manitoba French Halfbreed, the leader of the Red River Trouble, the unseated and disenfranchised member of parliament, the hunted and exiled fugitive, the inmate of eastern asylums, the American citizen, the Jesuit school teacher, to return with them to the Saskatchewan. This deputation took along with it the following letter from the well known priest, Father Andre.

"The opinion here is so prominent in your favour and longs for you so ardently that it would be a great disappointment to the people of Prince Albert if you did not come. So, you see, you absolutely must come. You are the most popular man in the country, and with the exception of four or five persons, all the world impatiently expects you. I have this to say--Come; Come quickly." (2)

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(1) "Depuis environ un an, une trentaine d'agitateurs, sous pretexte que le Government violait leurs droits les plus sacres, se reunissaient souvent a l'ecart dans le bois, a l'ombre des grandes epinettes et complotaient, avec serment de ne dire a personne ce dont il s'agissait. Nous desapprouvames hautement ces menees secrets. Un premier acte de ces assemblees fut d'aller chercher le trop fameux Riel, le grand chef du mouvement metis en 1870, devenu depuis de temps citoyen americain."  
Fourmond, Father, writing from St. Laurent, May 24, 1885, Le Veritable Riel.

Also Lawrence Clarke's letter to the Minister of the Interior--  
Sessional Papers 1885, Vol XVIII, No. 13, Paper 116.

(2) Sessional Papers, 1886, Vol. XIX, No. 12, Paper 43.

At St. Peter's Mission in Montana the delegation found Riel as they said "humble and respectfully employed as a teacher in the Industrial College of the Jesuit Fathers of that place". (1) Riel asked them for 24 hours to decide, during which time he entertained them in his home. Later in describing their visit the delegated said:-

"We were received simple and true. The humble condition of his home reminded us of the opportunities he had for several years to become rich and even to make an exceptional fortune, and how at all risks he stood firm by the confidence of his people. We know how much he wrought for Manitoba and how much he struggled for the whole Northwest, and seeing how little he had worked for himself, we came back after a long trip of some 1400 miles with twice as much confidence as we had on leaving to go and seek him in a foreign land." (2)

At the expiration of the twenty-four hours Riel wrote the delegation his reply in a letter (3) which indicates that he was susceptible to flattery and at the same time he hoped to better his own position by forcing the Canadian government to give him money which he claimed was owed him. So he came back with the delegation, bringing his wife and family with him, and arrived at Batoche on July the first, 1884.

There was a great difference between Riel's position in 1869 and that in 1884. Then he had been a resident Canadian citizen, now he was a visiting American; then he had had a legal status with full franchise, but now, though his term of banishment had expired, he was permanently dispossessed of this right and, therefore, being deprived of his own

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(1) Quoted in Begg, A., History of the North West, Vol. III, page 185.

(2) Quoted in Begg, A., Ibid, page 185.

(3) Sessional Papers, 1886, Vol. XIX., No. 12, Paper 43.

legal status, he was placing himself as leader over those who politically were superior to him; then the provisional government which he had established with headquarters at Fort Garry had been as legal a government as existed at the time and under the peculiar circumstances which, due to a misunderstanding, had arisen, for the Hudson's Bay Company had given up its political jurisdiction and the imperial government had not at once taken up the reins and the period had been a sort of interregnum except for Riel's government; but now the provisional government which he set up with headquarters at Batoche was in direct opposition to the government which existed in the federal capital and to which the Metis owed allegiance. Riel did not seem to grasp these essential differences.

At first Riel was moderate enough. He seemed to have learned a lesson from his experiences of 1870. In his letter to Tache on July 25, 1884, he wrote:-

"Mes demarches ne sont pas des demarches de trouble. Je me propose d'agir dans le Nord-Ouest de la maniere la plus propre a me gagner l'approbation des gens honnetes et paisibles." (1)

But this spirit did not last. He was carried away with his own enthusiasm and lost his moral and mental balance as he saw the influence which he exercised over those who looked up to him for leadership, and soon he had his runners among the Indians. It is a significant coincidence that simultaneously with Riel's appearance on the Saskatchewan the story of Indian wrongs that did service in 1867-70 were revived. He had scarcely arrived at Prince Albert before runners were amongst the Indians telling them how the Hudson's Bay Company sold their lands but withheld the price (300,000 pounds). Big Bear and Lucky Man, forgetful of their recent agreement to settle down on the reserves immediately set off to join the Carlton District chiefs in demanding from Chief Factor Clarke the three hundred thousand pounds for which the Company had sold its charter, and failing Mr. Clarke's compliance with this demand they were to report to Riel for further instructions. (2)

This phase of Riel's plans needs some elaboration. To stir up the Indians was the "sine quae non" of the success of his schemes; yet to stir them up was to unloose a whirlwind which he could not control; and this is exactly what he did. Riel may be forgiven for many things but to justify his incitement of the Indians to murder and rapine is more

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(1) Le Veritable Riel (No Pagination)

(2) The Calgary Herald, August 9, 1884.

than any reasonable person cares to undertake. The Indians, if left to themselves, would not likely have rebelled (1) and to let them loose on defenceless homes with all the horrors of the scalping knife and torture was an act for which Riel later paid the penalty on the scaffold. He sent runners to all the tribes, some of them hundreds of miles away, with letters edited by himself, instructing them to rise, to seize forts and ammunition. These runners came to Shell River district, to Qu' Appelle, to Poundmaker in the Battleford district, to Big Bear at Fort Pitt. He cunningly took advantage of an eclipse of the sun to work upon the Indian imagination saying it was a sign to rebel. Much evidence might be advanced to show Riel's guilt in this connection, but from it all only a few proofs are necessary:

Robert Jefferson, the Indian agent on Poundmaker's reserve reports:-

"Emissaries from Riel. No sooner had the different bands assembled under Poundmaker than a further deputation arrived in camp. They knew that some people were waverers. They put their views before the Indians and a detachment in force went across the river to interview the halfbreeds and ascertain their views toward the new movement and, if necessary, intimidate them into joining.....Other messengers came from Duck Lake with a letter from Riel. Poundmaker called me one day and told me that council was to be held to hear what these messengers had to say." (2)

(1) "I have no hesitation in saying that I thoroughly believe the Indians would never have rebelled but for halfbreed influences chiefly through Riel."

Statement of Rev. Quinney, Anglican missionary at Onion Lake, Sessional Papers, 1886, Vol XIX, No. 4, Page 43.

(2) Jefferson, Robert Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan, Canadian North West Historical Publications, Vol. I, No. 5, pages 133 ff.

The letter referred to, which Poundmaker got Jefferson to translate from French to Indian, was as follows:-

"Praise God for the success he has given us. Capture all the police you can. Reserve their arms. Take Fort Battle, but save the provisions, ammunition and arms. Send a detachment to us of about 100 men." (1)

This letter was later found at Poundmaker's camp and was exhibited at the trials in Regina where Jefferson was called on as a crown witness to identify it.

Other letters similar to this were exhibited at the same time:-

"Dear relatives and friends, We advise you to pay attention. Be ready for anything. Take the Indians with you. Gather them from every side. Take all the ammunition you can in whatsoever storehouse it may be. Murder, growl and threaten. Stir up the Indians." (2)

Captain Wastie of Brandon and Detective O'Keefe brought a halfbreed prisoner before General Middleton at Winnipeg on March 18, 1885. It appeared the prisoner boarded the eastbound train at Qu'Appelle. Mr. Dexter, who was a passenger, noticed him and made known his discovery to the conductor. At Oak Lake the man got off and immediately began to arouse the halfbreeds by telling them he had been sent by Riel to invite them to come and join his ranks. He said Riel had 1500 followers and several big guns. The train was held at Oak Lake to watch the actions of the halfbreeds and through an interpreter to learn what he said to his fellows. On arrival of the train at Brandon, police went back to Oak Lake and arrested him. (3)

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(1) Sessional Papers 1886, Vol. 12, Paper 43.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Manitoba Free Press, March 18, 1885.

Wandering Spirit, one of the leading instigators of the Frog Lake massacre, when visited in his cell just prior to his execution, gave the following confession to W. B. Cameron:-

"I am glad you come to see me. You were through it all; I would rather speak to you than to any one else. Four years ago we were camped on the Missouri River in the Long Knives' Land. (United States) Big Bear was there, Imasees, Four Sky Thunder and other chiefs of the band. Riel was there trading whiskey to the Indians. He gave us liquor and said we would make war on this country. He asked us to join him in wiping out all Canadians. The government had treated him badly. He would demand much money from them. If they would not give he would spill blood, plenty Canadian blood. Last fall Riel sent word to us that when the leaves came out the halfbreeds would rise and kill all white. The Long Knives would come. They would buy the land, pay the Indians plenty money for it afterwards trade with them. All the tribes who wished to benefit must rise too and help to rid the country of the Canadiens. At the time of the Massacre (Frog Lake) Andre Nault a halfbreed told me he had in his pocket a letter from his cousin Riel telling him to stay with Big Bear's band and he would be safe. He would never be tried for what he did. 'Anyway,' he said, 'The Canadians can't beat us'." (1)

This Andre Nault, Riel's cousin mentioned above, was arrested by Captain Dickens at Fort Pitt and detained on suspicion of being the bearer of incendiary messages from Riel to Big Bear and, on being liberated, openly boasted that he would soon be in a position to be avenged on the police. (2)

Imasees, Big Bear's Son and the real instigator of the Frog Lake massacre just the day before the slaughter said to Thomas Quinn, the Indian agent,

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(1) Cameron, W. B. War Trail of Big Bear, page 233.

(2) Diary of Dickens, Queen's Quarterly, Spring, 1930, Passim.

"We have had bad advice from the halfbreeds this winter. They said they would spill much blood in the spring. They wished us to join them. They have risen already; we knew about it before you." (1)

Miserable Man, on being asked prior to his execution, why he rebelled said that Riel told Big Bear and his councillors at Duck Lake that he was going to start a rebellion when the leaves came out and that a son of Big Bear was the first to tell him of it. (2) Further evidence of the fact that Riel had his agents among the Indians is to be found in the various reports contained in the Sessional Papers of 1884 and 1885 as well as 1886.

"As a general thing the Indians of this district have been quiet and orderly although I have perceived a feeling of discontent at different times. I attribute it to the bad advice received from other than Indians." (3)

"I have the honour to inform you that Riel has held meetings at both Prince Albert and Duck Lake. I am also informed that he expressed a wish to confer with the Indian chiefs. I have already reported that I believe the Indians sympathetic with the halfbreeds. I believe now that Big Bear and his followers would have been upon their reserve but for the emissaries of Riel who it is said, invited him to meet that person at Duck Lake." (4)

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- (1) Cameron, W. B. Op. Cit., page 52.
  - (2) Sessional Papers, 1886, Vol. XIX, No. 4, page xliii. (Report of Superintendent General of Indian Affairs.)
  - (3) Anderson, W. Indian Agent at Edmonton, reporting on July 20, 1883 to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs. Sessional Papers, 1884, Vol. XVII, No. 3, page 77.
  - (4) Superintendent Crozier, reporting from Battleford, July 27, 1885, to the Comptroller of the North West Mounted Police Sessional Papers 1885, Vol. XVIII, No. 13, #116, page 99.



"---specious inducements held out to the Indians of the North West Territories by the leader of the halfbreed insurgents and his lieutenants. That the Indians who revolted had no reason for doing so is sufficiently established by the fact that they had no intention of doing so in the insurrection until messages reached them from the leaders of the halfbreed insurgents assuring them that great benefits would accrue to them in the shape of rich booty.---The Indians who revolted do not plead grievances in extenuation of their having done so. On the contrary they express regret for the part they took and say they were led into it by the leader of the halfbreed insurrection. The agent at Battleford reports that the Indians in that vicinity seemed happy and contented until the halfbreed insurgents began to trouble them with messages. The purport of these false mis-sives was, among other things, that the troops were on the way northward and that the Indians would be enlisted as soldiers or be massacred." (1)

"On the morning of the 18th of March, 1885, word was brought me that some halfbreeds were tampering with the Indians on One Arrow's reserve. I found that Gabriel Dumont had been on the reserve and invited the Indians to attend a meeting on the following day. I drove to Chief Arrow and explained to him. He spoke in glowing terms of the loyalty of himself and his band. But on returning to Batoche I was surrounded by an armed mob of about forty halfbreeds commanded by Riel who gave orders to make me and my interpreter prisoners. The bands of Beardy and Okemasis remained neutral for a few days but were finally persuaded to join the rebels through the influence of the halfbreeds seconded by the supplies of various kinds such as presents to their camps from the plunder captured at Batoche." (2)

"All seemed happy and contented with their lot till about January when messengers began to come and go and I saw uneasiness. Then I found that messengers were being sent from Riel to them. I took out presents of tea and tobacco. I found the Indians sulky." (3)

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- (1) Sessional Papers of 1886, Vol. XIX, No. 4, pages ix and xi. Report of the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs.
  - (2) Ibid, page 125, Lash, J. B., Indian agent from Carlton reporting to the Superintendent.
  - (3) Ibid, page 69, Rae, J. M., Indian Agent from Battleford reporting on June 20, 1885 to the Superintendent.

"I have no hesitation in saying that I thoroughly believe the Indians would never have rebelled but for halfbreed influences chiefly through Riel. Several times last winter the chief at Onion Lake told me of Big Bear's visit to Riel; how he was taken into a large upper room, grandly furnished. He got Big Bear to sign a paper promising to obey all future orders Riel should give and to help him in his contemplated fight with the white man. Our chief said he also signed the same paper which Riel sent around by Big Bear to all the chiefs." (1)

"Immediately after the fight at Duck Lake messengers were sent to my Indians by the rebel leaders with exaggerated reports of their victory over the police and calling on them to seize the provisions and ammunition and go and join them. They were also told if our troops were successful in the north they would receive the same fate from the hands of our men on their return east. We can judge how unsettled the poor Indians must have been. For a time they fully expected to be punished whether they took up arms or not." (2)

"During the rebellion all the bands in the district were in an unsettled condition owing to the presence of messengers from Riel and Big Bear and others who told them to be in readiness to take up arms and to raid the government and Hudson's Bay stores." (3)

"The latter part of February runners made their appearance among the Bear's Hill Indians bearing messages from Big Bear, Little Pine and others." (4)

"Runners were constantly on the move between the different camps inciting their occupants to join the rebels. A halfbreed runner tried to persuade the Sioux to rise." (5)

It is to be noted that these were not reports warning the government of impending trouble; they were reports sent in, for the most part, after the rebellion had broken out.

- (1) Ibid, page xliii, Quinney, Rev., missionary of the Church of England, stationed at Onion Lake reporting.
- (2) Ibid, page 62, McDonald, A., the agent from Indian Head, on October 4, 1885, reporting to the Superintendent.
- (3) Sessional Papers of 1886, Vol. XIX, No. 4, page 70, Anderson, W., the agent from Edmonton, reporting to the Superintendent on August 26, 1885.
- (4) Ibid, page 114, Lucas, S. B., acting agent from Peace Hills on October 5, 1885, reporting to the Superintendent.
- (5) Sessional Papers of 1886, Vol XIX, No. 6, page 62, Superintendent Deane reporting.

Additional evidence might be given but why labour further to prove a point which must already be obvious, that Riel sent runners to the various Indian bands with the deliberate intention and at least partial success of stirring them up to wanton acts of cruelty and destruction. It does not fall within the scope of the present work to narrate the incidents connected with the massacre of nine people by the Frog Lake Indians, nor the slaying by ~~Man-Without-Blood~~ of Benard Tremont, a settler near Battleford, nor the killing by Ikteh of James Payne, farm instructor on the Stony Indian Reserve nor other acts of outlawry. The individual murderers later paid the penalty on the scaffold and Riel, the prime mover, was held equally responsible and met the same fate. Had Riel not thus stirred the Indians, with such dire results, it is quite probable that he would not have hung, for public opinion would not have been so violently against him; but as it was, many, who rather sympathized with the cause which he was championing, found their sympathies alienated by the acts which their own consciences could not condone.

Numerous incidents might be narrated to show the effect that Riel's runners among the Indians were having, but from the many, four only will be given. The first shows the animosity, resulting in hindrance, exhibited by the Indians against the contractors and men who were rapidly laying down the Canadian Pacific Railway across the prairies. One day "Front Man" sent the railway gang scurrying in panic out of a bush in which they were cutting ties. But Superintendent Shurtcliffe of the Mounties soon settled matters. Another Indian, Pie-a-Pot, and his tribe later pitched camp on the railway right of way and refused to move when asked to by the contractors. Two police, on arriving on the scene, ordered the Indians to move on, but were

confronted by stubborn refusal, gun waving, firearm feats and such like. The sergeant gave the Indians fifteen minutes to get under way and, along with his companion, quietly sat in the saddle in spite of jeers and unfriendly gesticulations. At the end of the allotted time he suddenly jumped from his horse, rushed past the amazed chief, and into a tent. Kicking the centre pole out, he brought the tent to the ground. Proceeding thus, he soon had the tents down, and the Indians, taken aback, got on the trek to their reserve. (1)

In September, 1884, Kahwechetwaymot, a member of Big Bear's band, went to John Craig, farm instructor, and asked him for provisions for a sick child. Not getting any, he went away but returned a few minutes later with two aids--his brother and a thick axe handle. He beat Craig badly and took his supplies. When Corporal Sleigh went to arrest him, Kahwechetwaymot scoffed and refused to surrender. Superintendent Crozier and twenty-five men came to arrest him but again there was a refusal. Inspector Antrobus and more than sixty men came as reinforcements for the police. The details of the arrest were thrilling, including tense moments when Wandering Spirit and other young bloods raised their rifles, drew beads with glinting eyes down the barrels on the members of the police force, their fingers itching at the triggers, lowered raised and lowered their rifles, and the arrest had finally to be made by force. Battle and bloodshed hung trembling in the balance. Scuffling ensued but no gun shot gave the signal for blood. The arrest was made but Kahwechetwaymot was not long detained. (2)

(1) MacBeth, R. G. Policing the Plains, pages 95ff.

(2) Cameron, W. B. Op. Cit., Chapter 3, passim.

Ocotober, 1884, saw Big Bear's band encamped at Fort Pitt to receive their annual money grant. When in 1875 the treaties previously mentioned between the Indians and the Great White Mother had been made Big Bear had refused to sign. He and his band lived nomadic lives, drifted across the boundary into Montana where they thieved and became such a nuisance that they were sent back to Canadian soil. Finally, driven by starvation in 1883, Big Bear fixed his signature to a treaty and now the payment was to be made on the twentieth. Each chief was to receive \$25, each councillor \$15; all others, men, women and children \$5. This was to continue each year "while grass grew and water ran". On the nineteenth a young chief, Little Poplar rode into camp and stirred up sufficient unrest among the Indians that for two days they danced the war dance in a spirit of righteous indignation and refused to be paid. Later, however, they took their money. But this shows that bad seed was sprouting quickly in excitable breasts. (1)

The effect of the sinister influence exerted upon the Indians is shown still more clearly by the fourth incident, an event which took place late in 1884. Magnus Begg, Indian agent among the Black Feet, reported to Superintendent Sam Steele that the former friendly attitude of the Indians seemed to be changing to one of sulkiness and hostility. When Steele asked him about a certain halfbreed who had been with Riel in Montana, Begg, on being given the man's description, reported that such a man was in the camp of Chief Crowfoot. Steele had the man arrested

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(1) Cameron, W. B., Op. Cit., Chapter 2, passim.

ed but he escaped by jumping from the train. Steele took two men and an interpreter, Walters, Kerr and l'Hereux by name, and went right into Crowfoot's tent to re-arrest the man. Crowfoot, though taken by surprise, jumped up and stood threateningly in front of Steele but Steele brushed him aside, waved back several other chief men, siezed the halfbreed by the collar, whirled him about and handed him over to his two policemen to take away. Steele personally stayed in the tent with the hostile Indians while the victim was being led off. He told Crowfoot not to believe such a man who spoke with a "forked tongue". Steele reported to Superintendent Herchmer that he was sure such a man was one of Riel's runners and that there were others too, and the sooner the government knew it the better. (1)

Such is the multiplicity of similar events which might be narrated that it seems as though the signs should not have been hard to read, and that the government must have known that a rebellion was at the point of breaking out. There are many who, after an event has taken place, point the finger in an insinuating way and say, "I told you so". But it is not to the opinions of such as these that one needs go; rather to those opinions expressed prior to the outbreak.

"From all parts of the Northwest, but especially from the southern and eastern parts, come rumours of disaffection among the different Indian bands. With such a people and under such circumstances all that is required is the occasion and the leader to land the North West in the middle of a first class Indian war." (2)

The "occasion" and the "leader" were soon at hand and the prophecy was soon to be fulfilled. Still further warnings that the rebellion might be

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(1) Steele, Col. S. Forty Years in Canada, pages 181ff.

(2) The Edmonton Bulletin, June 14, 1884.

seen approaching are not lacking. Were the eyes of the government blind and their ears deaf that they could not see or hear? Then, surely, the disastrous events which followed might have been averted.

"Everything was now approaching a crisis. We of the rank and file in quite a familiar way in the barrack-room used to talk of the coming rebellion as a matter of course. I remember our corporal singing out from his bed, 'Well, boys, old Riel will be starting on the 18th.' A civilian came to me to take his leave of me in early March of 1885 and said, 'Good-bye, old man. I want to get through before this rebellion begins'." (1)

"The latest Indian immigration from the south includes Little Poplar and his six wives. He has been living in the United States for some time and the stories of his people's wrongs have reached him and patriotism impelled him to come north to right them. There is no immediate danger to be apprehended, he will do nothing hastily. He will spend the winter on the Saskatchewan and if affairs are conducted to suit him all will be well, but if not, then in the spring he will 'make things lively.' He has gone to see Big Bear on the subject." (2)

"Riel has openly defied the Queen's authority. He claims that the Halfbreeds and Indians are under his complete control and that they will fight for their rights. The white settlers are alarmed. They have no arms nor ammunition but remain loyal. A meeting was held at Prince Albert to-day at which 500 men were present. They stated their willingness to enroll against Riel if the government would find them arms and ammunition. Colonel Herchmer with 30 policemen and 24 horses left Calgary on Tuesday for Regina. This means that Calgary at the present is left practically without any police force in it." (3)

The expression of opinion by the policemen as contained in the following telegrams which they sent is also of importance in leading one to believe that the rebellion should have been foreseen and therefore forestalled.

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- (1) Donkin, J. C. Trooper and Red Skin, page 103.
  - (2) The Battleford Herald of October 4, 1884.
  - (3) The Calgary Herald, March 18, 1885.

"Halfbreeds excited, preparing arms." (1)

"Halfbreeds excited. Reported they threaten attack on Carlton before 16th. Halfbreeds refuse to take freight for government; will stop all freight coming into country after 16; getting arms ready." (2)

"Lieut. Gov. received telegram dated Carlton to-day from Crozier saying rebellion may break out any moment and be joined by Indians." (3)

"The following received from Crozier: Rumour Indians being tampered with. Large force should be sent right away that arrest be made and prevent further trouble from Riel and his followers." (4)

But there were some who took the opposite view to this, some who thought the troubles would blow over without serious recourse to arms.

"It is true there exists among them discontent which for the most part is for legitimate reasons but the federal government is seriously considering the cause of their griefs and promises to remedy them as soon as possible. It is impossible for us to believe that our friends down there would compromise themselves to the point of rebellion even if they should be advised to do so by those who ought to know better." (5)

The first official notice we have of Riel's reappearance on Canadian soil is a report made by Superintendent Crozier in July in which he states:-

"Louis Riel arrived at Duck Lake with family brought in by halfbreeds. They brought him as their leader agitating for their rights. Riel held meetings at Prince Albert and Duck Lake; at the latter place the audience was composed chiefly

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- (1) Sessional Papers, 1885, No. 13, Paper No. 116, page 113, from the Commissioner, Regina, March 12, 1885.
  - (2) Ibid, page 113, from Superintendent Crozier, Carlton, March 11, 1885.
  - (3) Ibid, page 113, Superintendent Irvine, Regina, March 14, 1885.
  - (4) Ibid, page 113, Deane, Regina March 19, 1885.
  - (5) Le Manitoba, March 20, 1885.



"of French halfbreeds and Indians, and Riel is said to have told the Indians that they have rights as well as the halfbreeds and that he wished to be the means of having them redressed." (1)

The very presence of Riel tended to fan discontent and discord into rebellion. When Superintendent Crozier notified the government that this hot-headed, vain, but magnetic agitator had come among his old compatriots, steps should have been taken to deport him or control him. Such sentiment was expressed at the time by a western newspaper when it said:-

"There is not a man in this country with a degree of intelligence above that of Chief Poundmaker's stupidest and most ignorant brave who does not know that the Dominion Government is solely to blame for the present troubles in the North West. There is not a man who is not aware that the halfbreeds were first deeply wronged then contemptuously neglected, and finally allowed in the face of day to make their preparation for an appeal to arms. There is not an individual in Canada who might not have known for six months that the murderer of Scott, the man whom after paying him to leave the country-- Sir John declared he wished to God he could catch, has been instigating rebellion. Yet no effort was made, either to cut the ground from under his feet by granting the reasonable demands of those whom he was misleading or to put an end to his operations by lock and key." (2)

It is just one more example of the government's lackadaisical procrastination that nothing was done in this regard and dire indeed were the results.

That discontent was fanned is attested by the fact that from now on the demands of the halfbreeds were not confined to scrip, patents and land survey. They complained that direct communication with Europe via the Hudson Bay was denied the West; they complained that the North

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(1) Sessional Papers, 1885, Vol. XVIII, No. 13, #116, page 98.  
Also see: Haydon, A. L. The Riders of the Plains, page 123.  
and Steele, Col. S. B. Op. Cit., page 201.

(2) Manitoba Free Press, April 1, 1885.

West was treated as a mere appendage to Canada, and that, though the Territories were under a government which had been temporary for 15 years, they were refused the administration in the matter of contracts for public works and supplies, that settlers were coerced at elections, that settlers were not allowed to perform their breaking and cropping on pre-exemptions in lieu of their homesteads, and that they were charged dues on timber, rails and firewood required for home use.

So the spark grew. In August, 1884, Sergeant Brooks wired from Prince Albert that "Big Bear was in Council "with ten other chiefs" and that Riel had held "several private meetings at the South Branch, attended by leading halfbreeds." (1) On September 1, a meeting was held at St. Laurent, where Henry Jackson made an inflammatory speech, in which he said that the North West Territory "belonged to the Indians and not to the Dominion of Canada." (2) On December 23, Superintendent Gagnon reported that the halfbreeds of St. Laurent and Batoche had held a meeting to adopt a resolution which had been duly forwarded to Ottawa and that Riel was pressed to remain among them and had been presented with a house and would be given a purse next month. (2) The next report was to the effect that when things quieted down in January Riel threatened to leave the country as he was not recognized by the government as a British subject, but the halfbreeds held a meeting and induced him to remain. (2)

The resolution referred to above was the one drawn up at a large public meeting held in September, 1884, at St. Laurent. This Bill of Rights, as it was called, was forwarded to the government containing

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(1) Haydon, A. L., Op. Cit., page 124.

(2) Steele, Col. S. B., Op. Cit., page 201.

seven requests as follows:-

- (1) The subdivision of the provinces of the North West Territories.
- (2) The halfbreeds to receive the same land grant as the Manitoba halfbreeds.
- (3) Patents to be issued at once to those in possession.
- (4) The sale of half a million acres of Dominion land, the proceeds to be applied to the establishment of schools, hospitals, etc., and to give the poorer halfbreeds grain for seed and also farm implements.
- (5) The reservation of one hundred townships of swampy hay land for distribution among the children of halfbreeds during the next 120 years.
- (6) Grants of at least \$1000 in each case for the support of a nunnery in every settlement.
- (7) Better terms and provisions for the support of the Indians.

Clause seven was inserted with diplomatic ingenuity to obtain the support of the Indians.

Thus Riel acted; meetings of inspiration and agitation, runners carrying letters and messages to outlying districts, a provisional government with himself as the head even as in Manitoba 15 years earlier, a Bill of Rights also following the Manitoba precedent. In less than nine months the first shot had been fired and the rebellion was afoot.

In the prairie west a rebellion broke out; in that vast extent of territory stretching from the old postage stamp Manitoba westward to the foothills of the Rockies and reaching from the international boundary northward to the frozen regions of the Arctic, an insurrection took place. It was more than regrettable; it was needless.

The leader of the movement was Louis Riel, a halfbreed born in the west but educated in the east, a man influential and popular amongst his own people who looked upon him as a compatriot who had with difficulty on a former occasion secured for them their rights at the expense of his own personal health and freedom. He was a man gifted with brilliant qualities of heart and mind but, unfortunately, in the latter he was afflicted with a tendency towards insanity which so influenced his actions that instead of being a saviour he was a rebel.

Those whom he led were likewise halfbreeds, who in 1870 had fled before the rising tide of eastern civilization after having wrung their rights from a thoughtless government by a show of force, and who found the conditions, from which they had previously escaped, once more engulfing them, but with added seriousness. In despair, yet in hope, they invited their erstwhile leader and saviour again to become their liberator. But Riel did not realize the difference between his position in 1870 and that in 1885; consequently his leadership, affected as it came to be with flashes of insanity, was unwise and the rebellious movement was ill considered.

However, even if ill-considered and unwisely led, the insurrection had much justification. Far from being a rebellion caused by the insanity of its leader, it was a rebellion brought about by many real grievances on the part of those who rose in protest. Being mainly farm-

ers, the Metis were vitally interested in the land question; yet this was the one phase of their life in which they could not secure satisfaction, or even justice. They asked for, then begged, and finally demanded grants of land or scrip, to which the government admitted they were entitled, yet which they were denied; they needed title deeds for their farms and homes but these they could not secure; they wanted a system of land survey to which they had long been accustomed and which they felt was essential to their mode of life but for this they petitioned in vain. Moreover, they mistrusted, frequently with good cause, many of the officials who were placed over them yet whom they could neither control nor influence because the west had no representation in the federal government. Finally, they were urged on by disgruntled white speculators who hoped for personal profit at the expense of a misguided prey, but who forsook them when danger arose.

Though these disgruntled white people betrayed them, many starving redmen became their allies. The Indians, in spite of some governmental help secured through the signing of treaties, were finding life hard on the prairies which were once their domain. Disastrous inroads of smallpox and the sudden but complete disappearance of the buffalo caused such distress among the tribes that even reverence for the priests and respect for, or fear of, the police, all of whom advised them to remain aloof from the disturbances, were not sufficient to curb their warlike instincts when the halfbreed rebels sent emissaries holding out specious inducements to them to join in the insurrection.

To Riel, the leader, the rebellion brought an early and ignominious death on the scaffold; it placed him in a grave marked by a small and

insignificant tombstone on which is engraved the one word "Riel".

To the rebels the insurrection brought partial loss and partial gain. Some of them lost their lives, many of them lost their friends and loved ones; all of them lost a season's returns from the garden and the farm as well as the joys of a happy family life. In the matter of river lot survey they had to reconcile themselves as best they could to the system against which they complained; in the matter of land grant their rebellion was needless for their point was won a month before the fighting started. On the other hand they gained representation for the Territories in the Dominion House of Commons; they secured better facilities for the registration of land and quicker action in the matter of acquiring title deeds for their homes. But chiefly they forced themselves upon the attention of eastern Canada and made the older provinces of the Dominion realize the fact that the infant west must be given consideration and fairness.

From the standpoint of the federal administration the rebellion was entirely inglorious. It brought to light dust covered petitions which had become entangled in a maze of red tape and pigeon-holed in the obscurity of procrastinating officialdom. It showed governmental carelessness rather than foresight, administrative inactivity rather than diligence.

THE SECOND RIEL INSURRECTION

(1)

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Tel que depeint dans les lettres de:-

Sa Grandeur, Mgr. Grandin, Eveque de Saint Albert  
Rev. P. Andre, Superior des missions du District de  
Carlton.

Rev. P. Leduc, Vicair General de Saint Albert.  
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(Enregistre conformement a l'acte du parlement du  
Canada en l'Annee 1886 par Abraham Guay au Bur-  
eau du Ministre de l'Agriculture.)

Nous, membres de la famille Riel, declarons et  
certifions que ceci est une vraie copie des doc-  
uments ecrits et composes par Louis "David" Riel.

Les membres de la famille  
Joseph et Alexandre Riel  
Octavie Lavallee  
Henriette Poitras

Date a St. Vital  
12 Janvier, 1886

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