

WILLIAM MACTAVISH: THE LAST GOVERNOR
OF ASSINIBOIA

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a historical biography of William Mactavish, Hudson's Bay Company Governor of Assiniboia from 1858 to 1870 and of Rupert's Land from 1864 to 1870. Drawn mostly from primary documents, it studies Mactavish's character and personality, his environment, and his actions and policy as Governor of Assiniboia. Though he was accused to some extent of having done otherwise, this thesis takes the position that Mactavish governed the Settlement not in the interests of the Company but of the Settlement, and that instead of sympathizing with the Red River Rebellion he did what he could to quell it.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A.H.B.C.	Archives of the Hudson's Bay Company
P.A.C.	Public Archives of Canada
P.A.M.	Provincial Archives of Manitoba

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION¹

William Mactavish was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, on 29 March 1815.² He was the second child, the first boy, of a family that came to number three girls and six boys.³ His mother was Letitia Lockhart Mactavish; his father was Dugald Mactavish, Sr., a lawyer who later became sheriff, or chief judge, of the County of Argyllshire.⁴

At the age of eighteen, Mactavish was appointed Apprentice Clerk in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company. His brother Dugald, two years younger, was appointed to a similar position at the same time.⁵ Both sailed for North America in the summer of 1833. William Mactavish spent his first year in Rupert's Land at Norway House, then the next twenty-three at various posts in the Company's Northern

¹Information documented elsewhere will not be documented in this chapter.

²M. A. MacLeod (ed.), The Letters of Letitia Hargrave (Toronto, 1947), p. 193, Letitia Hargrave to mother, York Factory, 29 Mar 1845; W. L. Morton (ed.), Alexander Begg's Red River Journal (Toronto, 1956), p. 162.

³Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. xxi; see Appendix A for further details on the family and the Clan McTavish.

⁴Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. xx.

⁵G. P. de T. Glazebrook (ed.), The Hargrave Correspondence (Toronto, 1938), pp. 126-27, J. G. McTavish to James Hargrave, 18 Dec 1833; see Appendix B for the Hudson's Bay Company's fur trade organization.

Department before being appointed officer in charge of Fort Garry in 1857. In 1840 his older sister, Letitia, married the officer in charge of York Factory, James Hargrave, and came to live with him on the shores of Hudson Bay. Since Mactavish himself was stationed for much of this period at York, the two in effect had been reunited. Mactavish's brother Dugald, meanwhile, was tracing a career similar to Mactavish's in the Company's Western Department.⁶

A year after taking charge of Fort Garry, Mactavish was appointed Governor of Assiniboia, the chief officer of the local Company-appointed Red River Settlement government. He married a Red River girl at about the same time, a daughter of Andrew McDermot, one of the Settlement's leading merchants. In 1860, on the death of Governor-in-Chief George Simpson, Mactavish was named Acting Governor of Rupert's Land, which put him in charge of the Company's Northern and Southern Departments. Replaced in that capacity by A. G. Dallas in 1862, he returned to it on Dallas' departure in 1864. Throughout Mactavish had served also as officer in charge of Fort Garry and Governor of Assiniboia, and for a short period in 1861-62 as President of the Courts of Red River and Rupert's Land. Relinquishing his duties as officer

⁶See Appendix C for brief sketch of Dugald Mactavish's career with the Company.

in charge of Fort Garry in 1864, he continued as Governor of both Assiniboia and Rupert's Land until the Red River Rebellion of 1869-70. He returned home to England in the latter year, and died in Liverpool on 23 August 1870.

The reasons for writing a thesis on William Mactavish are good ones. Mactavish was an important figure in the Canadian west, but no book or article of any kind has been devoted to him; and there is a good deal to be said. The twelve years during which Mactavish was Governor of Assiniboia were crucial ones. Equally important, perhaps, he was Governor immediately preceeding and during most of the Red River Rebellion. The part he played in it was not a prominent one, but he and the position he held were so potentially significant that he has been the subject of much passing comment by those writing on the Rebellion.

Mactavish will be traced from his hiring by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1833 to his death in 1870, though the bulk of the time and emphasis will be allotted to his years as Governor of Assiniboia. As indicated by the title, his political rather than his business career will be concentrated on. At the same time, attention will be paid to the people around him and the setting he worked in. The next chapter, Chapter II, will present briefly Mactavish's career between 1833 and 1857. Chapters III through VII will discuss Red River Settlement, Mactavish's later career with the

Company, and his problems as Governor of Assiniboia during the years of agitation that were finally brought to a halt by near-famine, the transfer of the territory, and agitation of a higher order, the Red River Rebellion. Chapters VIII through XII follow Mactavish through the Rebellion, presenting the uprising sketchily in its entirety but treating in detail those aspects in which he was directly involved. The final section presents the conclusions that might be drawn from the facts presented.

Several key aspects of Mactavish's Red River years will be looked at in passing or in detail:

1. Mactavish's and the Company's attitudes toward the Nor'-Wester newspaper.
2. Mactavish's decision not to try to return Canadian prisoners such as Corbett and Schultz to jail when they had been released by friends.
3. The question of whether the Company kept Mactavish fully informed on the transfer of territory.
4. Mactavish's attitude toward the transfer, and the Rebellion.
5. The question of whether Mactavish warned the Canadian Government in June 1869 of impending trouble.
6. The question of whether Mactavish was warned that Riel was going to occupy Fort Garry, and whether it would have made any difference.

7. The extent that Mactavish's illness was a deciding factor in the early progress of the Rebellion.

The above are mentioned because they are prime areas that most need comment. One of the primary purposes throughout, though, is to bring Mactavish out from the shadows and throw light on him as an individual, and this presented its problems. As already mentioned, no book or article has been written on Mactavish. In fact, surprisingly often he escaped being commented on by the people around him. Pages, for instance, were written by visitors to Fort Garry about Mactavish's subordinates, while Mactavish himself went virtually unnoticed. Even his fellow citizens wrote little that shed light on the deeper aspects of Mactavish as a person. Constant references to his "intelligence," "integrity," "goodness," and the like, though reassuring, are vague generalities that provide hollow foundations for reconstructing a personality. Those few writers who have attempted to fix Mactavish's personal characteristics usually were not much help; they either brought little insight to bear on the matter or merely gave Mactavish a personality that would support the case they were making. Further clues to Mactavish's personality could have been gotten from his married life, but little on it came to light. In spite of these obstacles, a determined effort has been made to discover Mactavish's character traits because

they were an important factor in Red River politics during the 1860's, and because they might shed additional light on the Red River Rebellion as well.

The personality that emerges here, assuming that one does, will come less from outside testimony than from his private correspondence available. Where necessary, a balance has been struck between the testimony of his associates and that of his correspondence. The Mactavish that results may seem a trifle strange to those accustomed to the usual descriptions, which make him out to be overly pessimistic, extremely conscientious, almost self-torturing, but it is one that might stand up better against objective evidence than would the chance remarks of acquaintances whose ability to analyze character remains untested. In any case, it is mainly Mactavish himself, not the writer, who through action and quotation presents Mactavish's personality here, so the reader can judge for himself.

The term "Rebellion" is often used in the latter chapters to refer to the events in Red River of 1869-70. Any term is potentially controversial because of the different positions taken over the legal status of the uprising and the "intent" of its leaders, the degree to which the writer would like to condemn or excuse the affair, and other factors. "Rebellion" is used here, not to define the incident's legality, though legally it was a rebellion, nor the

intent of its leaders, something that has yet to be closely examined with any objectivity, but merely because the word comes closer to describing the event than does any other.

This might lead to a discussion of "points of view," a rather loose phrase often used to describe everything from blatant propaganda to subtle prejudices entering a work in spite of strenuous attempts on the part of the writer to allow for or eliminate them. The subject is brought up because the Red River Rebellion seems particularly subject to deliberate treatment from "points of view," the implication being that it is a legitimate historical technique. There is the Hudson's Bay Company point of view, the eastern Canadian point of view, the western Canadian point of view, the French Canadian point of view, and the British point of view, among others. Acting on these are such things as the Protestant point of view and the Catholic point of view. Most books written from one of these points of view hover suspiciously near propaganda. The author's nationality or place of birth often indicate in advance what the writer's conclusions on the Rebellion will be. To save conjecture over the origin of any of this kind of bias found in the following pages, those there devolve from a Protestant, Anglo-Saxon upbringing on the southwestern coast of the United States.

These many points of view gave rise to some research

problems. Too many writers writing on the Red River Settlement of the Rebellion era have been unable to resist tailoring the facts to fit their pre-set conclusions. This, however, merely became a matter of finding the bias and allowing for it. A more difficult problem was presented by those writers whose experience with the Settlement and lack of obvious bias lent their work a deceptive air of reliability. Alexander McArthur presented a good example of this phenomenon in his entire oft-quoted article--"The Causes of the Rising in the Red River Settlement, 1869-70"--published by the Manitoba Historical and Scientific Society. For instance:

Then came the bane of the company's existence, the establishment of a newspaper. For some time it was under the company's influence, and on kicking the traces the proprietor was quieted with a shrivealty. Under Mr. Dallas's Government the paper came into the hands of Dr. Schultz, one of the recent arrivals, come to engage with a relative in the free trade. Mr. McTavish opposed the Doctor's purchase of the paper, and when Governor Dallas left the colony the Nor'-Wester came out squarely against the company and called it approbrious names, such as the Grandmother of Fenchurch Street.⁷

McArthur was right to start off with; the newspaper was the bane of the Company's existence. But from that point on in this paragraph, which comes near to being typical, McArthur, though living in Red River during at least part of

⁷Alexander McArthur, "The Causes of the Rising in the Red River Settlement, 1869-70," Manitoba Historical and Scientific Society, Pub. No. 1, about 1882, p.4.

the time covered, showed a regrettable inability to get his facts straight. The newspaper was never under the Company's influence, and was never "quieted with a shrievalty" or anything else until the Rebellion. Mactavish did not oppose Schultz's buying the newspaper but authorized the Company loan that enabled him to do so. The last two clauses are incorrect in that they imply that a change for the worse took place when Dallas left. The newspaper was against the Company's government before Dallas got there, during Dallas' stay, and, merely continuing its policy, after Dallas left. The foregoing is given as an example of a research problem, not to suggest the approach taken in the following pages to such problems. The presence of statements contradictory to many presented here is realized, but little attention is paid them.

Reliability of documents is always a problem, but, because of the emotions aroused by the Red River Rebellion, it might be more of a problem here than usual. It has been attacked by using primary sources as much as possible, with no major points being made and no deviations from accepted theory ventured unless based on them. But this could not be the whole solution. McArthur's article quoted from above is a main primary source, for instance. So primary sources themselves were weighed for reliability as well. A body of primary and secondary material so handy for supporting any

point of view leaves much room for prejudice and lack of discrimination to distort the story of Red River and its rebellion. The hope is that the mistakes in this paper arise from mere ignorance rather than from either of the above.

CHAPTER II

BEFORE RED RIVER

London in the summer of 1833 found the "Prince Rupert" and the "Prince of Wales," two principal ships of the Hudson's Bay Company, in port. Waiting to go aboard them were William and Dugald Mactavish, eighteen and sixteen years of age, two young Scots who had just made their way down out of the western highlands of Argyllshire and were on their way to North America. They were following a path many of their fellow Scots had trod before them, but somewhere out on the North Atlantic the two brothers would turn off on a less traveled road. Where most Scotsmen before them had made their way in droves to the Atlantic seaboard colonies of North America, William and Dugald were to land much farther north and west, on the shores of the Hudson and James Bays. For they were recruit fur traders for the Hudson's Bay Company, and were going out to become eventually future rulers in the Company's sprawling North American domain. William was to sail on the "Prince Rupert" for York Factory, Dugald on the "Prince of Wales" for Moose Factory.¹ The air was tense and hurried, as was usual before a sailing, but the Company's officers were polite and friendly to the two young Highlanders, if only because of their uncle, John

¹P.A.C., Hargrave Papers, Series 4, Vol 29, Mactavish to mother, (London), sometime in 1833.

George McTavish, "who seems to be a general favorite."²

Voyages to Hudson Bay were usually long and tedious, but the one that year was longer and more tedious than usual. Both ships, Mactavish said, were "detained 1 month in the Straits [Hudson Strait] by ice which was so close packed that in a gale of wind the Ship with her sails set could not move 1 inch."³ But luckily the two ships were stuck fairly close by, and Mactavish once or twice went over the ice from piece to piece to the other ship and spent the day with his brother.

Finally breaking free, the ships separated on 23 August, Dugald's turning south for Moose Factory while William's bore southwest toward York. The "Prince Rupert" landed at York early in September, so late that it was forced by already-forming ice to winter at nearby Churchill instead of returning to England.⁴ Mactavish's first letter home from North America, sent soon after his arrival, said nothing about that desolate headquarters of the Northern Department. From York he was to make his way by canoe into the interior to Norway House, just north of Lake Winnipeg,

²Ibid.; John George McTavish, formerly with the North West Company, was one of the Hudson's Bay Company's more influential Chief Factors in North America.

³P.A.C., Hargrave Papers, Mactavish to mother, York Factory, 8 Sep 1833.

⁴Ibid., Mactavish to father, York Factory, 27 Aug 1834.

and soon after landing he set out for his inland station.⁵

Though the change was a radical one, Mactavish's first year in North America agreed with him: "I passed the last winter very well & enjoyed excellent health, although one would have supposed it would have been otherwise for the first year, the severe cold only tending to make me more vigorous and active. The climate of the country is infinitely superior to that of Great Britain."⁶

Conversations on the ship coming over in 1833 had led Mactavish to expect his transfer to the west coast following the winter at Norway House, but his uncle, John George McTavish, had other ideas. John George felt strongly that much depended on the first supervisor William worked under; he had told William's father, Dugald, Sr., that his son would be placed under James Hargrave, in charge of York Factory, a highly-thought-of protégé of John George's.⁷ This had been promised John George by Governor-in-chief George Simpson, and William Mactavish's staying his first year at Norway House had been counter to that promise.⁸

⁵Ibid., Mactavish to father, Norway House, 4 Jul 1834.

⁶Ibid.; Mactavish was sometimes given to exaggeration, but the climate he came from in Argyllshire was far from ideal, being damp and cloudy a good part of the year.

⁷Hargrave Correspondence, pp. 126-27, J. G. McTavish to James Hargrave, 18 Dec 1833.

⁸Ibid.

To make good the assurances he had made to his brother Dugald, Sr., John George was forced to exert his considerable influence on Governor Simpson, but the following summer, 1834, found Mactavish at York in the "good careful hands" of James Hargrave.⁹ His transfer to York was an agreeable one. "I am not sorry that I have been appointed to winter here as if I had gone further inland I would have become a perfect Indian in a few years, owing to my youth any customs or manners would have come alike to me."¹⁰

He spent the next two years at York, under the tutelage of his fellow Scot, Hargrave. In the summer of 1836, however, he was attacked by a disease "which is altogether confined to the bowels."¹¹ For his health, he was sent down that fall to winter at Red River. He was stationed at Lower Fort Garry, while most of the Company people were at the Upper Fort fifteen miles to the south. His first contact with Selkirk's Settlement was not a happy one:

I am at present in the retail shop here . . ., also trading with the Indians, which I prefer to the other sneaking employments. It is particularly disagreeable to deal with the colonists, as they always think you are cheating them, which they do not hesitate to tell you, they have been worse of late as a certain Gentleman struck one clerk a blow which made him fly under the counter

⁹Letters of Letitia Hargrave, pp. xxi-xxii.

¹⁰P.A.C., Hargrave Papers, Mactavish to father, York Factory, 27 Aug 1834.

¹¹Ibid., Mactavish to father, Norway House, 15 Aug 1836.

head over heels among sugar soap tobacco etc. But he paid for his fun £5. which the fellow got . . ."12

By the end of 1836, Mactavish's health had returned completely and he was looking forward to returning to York Factory in the spring, "as it is the best place in the country for pushing one's self into notice."¹³ Besides, as he wrote two years later, "in spite of the villanous sic climate I prefer York to any other place in the country."¹⁴

When he returned to York in the spring of 1837, it was to remain there for the next eleven years, aside from short trips into the interior and a furlough to England. During this eleven year period he continued in his letters a series of complaints about hard work that he had launched during his first stay at York, complaints that were to stretch almost unbroken to the end of his life. Life in the North American Fur Trade was not quite what Mactavish had expected. "When I first came to this country I expected to have had a very active life, you may judge of my surprise when I found myself tied down to the desk, from which I am not likely to get clear, and indeed I do not desire it now, as I am become accustomed to it and find that a sedentary life agrees better

¹²Ibid., Mactavish to father, Red River Settlement, 7 Dec 1836.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴P.A.C., Hargrave Papers, Mactavish to Mrs. Worsley, York Factory, 7 Sep 1838.

with me than I had anticipated."¹⁵ The trouble was, "I am kept pretty closely at work summer and winter."¹⁶ Elsewhere he puts it more forcefully: ". . . our work is now becoming so oppressive that I think few will view it in any other light than as downright slavery."¹⁷

He was supported in his attitude by his older sister Letitia, then at York: "I can give you no idea of the state of his looks & spirits . . . Willie is so weakened that it is painful to hear him speak & his eyes are red & blood shot. He never rests at night more than 6 hours, generally 4 and from the state of his mind he says he cannot sleep above two."¹⁸ And: "Will was much longer in getting well after the ship sailed than usual. Indeed it is only within the last 3 weeks that he has been able to eat."¹⁹ During busy periods Mactavish often worked from four thirty in the morning to late at night.²⁰ Even the hard-working Hargrave said at one time that Mactavish's work was "cruelty to lay

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷P.A.C., Hargrave Papers, Mactavish to father, York Factory, 31 Aug 1842.

¹⁸Letters of Letitia Hargrave, pp. 148-49, Letitia Hargrave to father, York Factory, 9 Sep 1843.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 179, Letitia Hargrave to mother, York Factory, 29 Nov 1843.

²⁰Ibid., p. xlvi.

on the shoulders of any one man."²¹ The long hours often had a thinning effect on Mactavish generally, bringing forth descriptions such as "bony" from Letitia.²² By 1843, Letitia had Mactavish, then working eighteen hours a day, writing his uncle asking him to use his influence to get Simpson either to get him proper help or to send him elsewhere.²³ A friend named Gladman was advising Mactavish to "rebel," but, Letitia said, "he wont if he can help it."²⁴

Part of the trouble was a shortage of clerks and accountants at York.²⁵ The other part was the quality of the help available. At one time Mactavish's only assistance came from a gentleman named R. M. Ballantyne, who according to Hargrave was "a fine lad, but as unfit to be his assistant, or any assistant in a Counting House as to be an Archbishop of Canterbury . . ."²⁶ Mactavish agreed: "I think myself it would have been a better joke, since they are determined to have a farce, to have sent out, either Mr. McKenzie's or

²¹Ibid., pp. lxxxi-lxxxii.

²²Ibid., p. 111, Letitia Hargrave to mother, York Factory, 14-16 May 1842.

²³Ibid., pp. 148-49, Letitia Hargrave to father, York Factory, 9 Sep 1843.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. lxix.

²⁶Ibid., pp. lxxxi-lxxxii; Ballantyne later left the Company's employ to become a novelist.

Mr. Finlayson's coat and trowsers stuffed with straw."²⁷ As a result of this kind of assistance Mactavish often worked "most of the night as well as day."²⁸

But there were brief respites. During slack seasons Mactavish often took to the woods, fishing, trapping, or "crawling in the swamps after Ducks & Geese."²⁹ He was joined in these activities during one period of several years by a Dr. Lane stationed at York. The fox trapping would get them out at five every morning so they could check their traps up to five miles away and be back at the Factory by eight thirty.³⁰ Sometimes this would bring Mactavish "home (while Hargrave is dressing himself by candle light) covered with hoar frost & snow."³¹ Other times the doctor and he would sleep near the traps "all night in a Winter Encampment not a human being nearer than the Fort & they not near each other."³²

²⁷Ibid., p. lxi.

²⁸Ibid., pp. lxxxii-lxxxiii.

²⁹P.A.C., Hargrave Papers, Mactavish to mother, York Factory, 16 Sep 1835.

³⁰Letters of Letitia Hargrave, pp. 128-29, Letitia Hargrave to mother, York Factory, 2-9 Dec 1842; Ibid., p. 179, Letitia Hargrave to mother, York Factory, 29 Nov 1843.

³¹Ibid., p. 90, Letitia Hargrave to mother, York Factory, 1 Dec 1840.

³²Ibid., p. 179, Letitia Hargrave to mother, York Factory, 29 Nov 1843.

Fishing called for an even greater expenditure of energy. Letitia said at one time that "his arms are gigantic & he attributes it entirely to his exertions in digging holes every day in the ice to set his lines. He seems mad for it."³³ Mactavish spent all one day digging two fishing holes in river ice five feet thick.³⁴ Outdoor activity, however, though it burned others brown, only left Mactavish "covered with freckles."³⁵

There were further diversions. Mactavish seemed adept at playing the barrel organ³⁶ and was "a great whist player & ponders well on every card."³⁷ And then: "Hargrave & he got pretty tipsy last Sunday night. After dinner they sat down to a very large case bottle of port & drank till the gentlemen came in to tea--when Hargrave bid William come in afterwards & finish it which they did to my surprise."³⁸ And

³³Ibid., p. 90, Letitia Hargrave to mother, York Factory, 1 Dec 1840.

³⁴Ibid., p. 144, Letitia Hargrave to mother, York Factory, 10 Apr 1843.

³⁵Ibid., p. 139, Letitia Hargrave to mother, York Factory, 1 Apr 1843.

³⁶Ibid., p. 110, Letitia Hargrave to mother, York Factory, 14-16 May 1842.

³⁷Ibid., p. 90, Letitia Hargrave to mother, York Factory, 1 Dec 1840.

³⁸Ibid., p. 184, Letitia Hargrave to mother, York Factory, 30 Mar 1844.

another time: "William was in here & Hargrave & he had herrings, after them a dram of whiskey to kill thirst, & finally a bottle of champagne."³⁹ But as Letitia suggested, drinking bouts were widely scattered.

And then, some years were not so demanding. "Willie has been perfectly well all Winter. His cheeks are as fat as I have seen them & he is in good spirits & has got through with his work so that they will have May & the greater part of June for tent living & preparing themselves for the toil of the Summer."⁴⁰ Occasionally the recreation was worse than the work: "Willie went off to his tent when the ship packet was closed, but unfortunately cut his foot badly with an axe chopping wood, & had to come home when he was confined for a fortnight, & has not looked well since."⁴¹

Hard work and a degree of disillusionment developed in Mactavish during the years at York Factory a positive dissatisfaction with his job and environment, a pessimism concerning his future advancement, and a distinctly objective and analytical--to avoid the word "cynical"--attitude toward

³⁹Ibid., p. 128-29, Letitia Hargrave to mother, York Factory, 2-9 Dec 1842.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 141, Letitia Hargrave to mother, York Factory, 1 Apr 1843.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 211, Letitia Hargrave to mother, York Factory, 30 Nov 1845.

the Company itself. As early as 1836, Mactavish wrote home to his father of his unhappiness with the country, but said that he intended nevertheless to stick it out.⁴² Later he was hoarding his pay so "that he may have money if he wished to leave the service & sees an opening elsewhere."⁴³

He was similarly unimpressed with the training he was getting: ". . . you will naturally suppose that if one is usefull [sic] they will advance him so as to secure him, but after being for about 10 or 12 years engaged in the Fur Trade a man becomes totally unfit for other business, & of course feels his incapacity, on this account he is obliged to stick by the Country, & the Gents know that they have him, besides almost everyone have families in this Country & on that account they are unwilling to leave it as those families are most of them at least perfectly unable [sic] to appear in society."⁴⁴

As for his chances for advancement, answering a question raised by his father on his prospects Mactavish replied, "I have none to write on. I cannot give even a

⁴²P.A.C., Hargrave Papers, Mactavish to father, Norway House, 15 Aug 1836.

⁴³Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 117, Letitia Hargrave to father, York Factory, 8 Sep 1842.

⁴⁴P.A.C., Hargrave Papers, Mactavish to Mary Mactavish, York Factory, 17 Sep 1837. Mactavish is referring to the half-breed families.

guess about how fortunate I may be in this service or whether I may ever rise higher than I have got, and if it were not on your accounts I would be indifferent, as for myself I will always make enough, as I intend to remain as I am, single."⁴⁵ And in 1839, on someone's suggesting that he come home for a season, he said if he asked for leave they probably would tell him "I was perfectly at liberty to quit the service."⁴⁶ He must defer a visit home, he continued, until he gained a status in the service "which by the bye may never come."

Mactavish was particularly bothered by the machinery of advancement. Promotion came by vote of the other officers in the Fur Trade. "You will at once see that partiality will do everything . . . a few quarrels among the Nobs and you are done for ever let you be as useful as you may."⁴⁷ And Mactavish had apparently already had "a few quarrels among the nobs."

. . . . it has been with me at least an up hill fight ever since I came to this Country as the Gentlemen here for what reason I could never find out were prejudiced against me, some few there were who were always very kind to me Mr. Hargrave who I hope you will soon see most of all as he notwithstanding all that was said of me, requested the Governor to let me winter here with

⁴⁵Ibid., Mactavish to mother, York Factory, 7 Sep 1840.

⁴⁶Ibid., Mactavish to father, York Factory, 1 Sep 1839.

⁴⁷Ibid., Mactavish to Mary Mactavish, York Factory, 17 Sep 1837.

him, where at least I would have a fair opportunity of showing myself. If I have improved the opinion formed of me so much the better if not I deserve the character they gave me.⁴⁸

There is no indication what character they gave him. Perhaps some were jealous of his connection with John George McTavish. Perhaps Mactavish was himself too impressed by his connection with his illustrious uncle. Then maybe it was Mactavish's personality. He was intelligent and witty, but he could also be caustic. His forays into the realm of character analysis could be pungent: "I pity the lady who marries Roger Beatson as he is the most waspish being I ever met with and has not one honourable feeling about him. I wonder what tempted him to become a soldier, as if ever I met with a coward he was that one."⁴⁹ Mactavish also was independent of attitude and confident of his own abilities. Speaking of him at York in 1840, Letitia said that "he . . . pads around as if he had the whole charge of the Factory."⁵⁰ Earlier, at Red River in 1836, he himself had said: ". . . however I am content, if I do not expect to make any thing like a fortune. I flatter myself that my services (altho

⁴⁸Ibid., Mactavish to father, York Factory, Sep 1837.

⁴⁹Ibid., Mactavish to Mary Mactavish, York Factory, 17 Sep 1837.

⁵⁰Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 58, Letitia Hargrave to mother, York Factory, Sep 1840.

not better than anothers) are always useful & that being the case I need never fear but that I will make an honest & decent livelihood by my own exertions, I consequently being independent as far as man can be so."⁵¹ And back at York he said that "the leaving of this service would grieve me very little as with the same exertion I am sure I could live anywhere."⁵² Furthermore, Mactavish almost certainly did not confine such comments to his private correspondence, and these plus a caustic remark now and then might have been all that was needed to get Mactavish off on the wrong foot.

But it was on the Company itself that Mactavish beamed his most jaundiced eye. He saw its prospects as dim, predicting as early as 1837 its decline, with the charter being called in by Parliament and the monopoly brought to an end.⁵³ And he saw little to be gotten out of working for it. He was sorry Dugald had not been transferred to his district because "I think that one has a better chance of obtaining the little that is to be gained in the service in the North than in the South."⁵⁴

⁵¹P.A.C., Hargrave Papers, Mactavish to father, Red River Settlement, 7 Dec 1836.

⁵²Ibid., Mactavish to father, York Factory, 1 Sep 1839.

⁵³Ibid., Mactavish to father, York Factory, Sep 1837.

⁵⁴Ibid.

The Company's centralized control also failed to appeal to him. In speaking of independence, Mactavish wrote: "I cannot bear the word, since I heard people declaring that we the Gentlemen of this country were the most independent set of men in the world."⁵⁵ "You would be astonished at the little influence that the Gents in the Country have, the H. B. Committee conduct everything as they please."⁵⁶

But through all his period of depression he could always count on his uncle, John George. As Letitia said as late as 1843, "if he were Willie's father he could not be more affectionate nor anxious about him."⁵⁷ Furthermore, he was doing a good job and his primary supervisor, Hargrave, appreciated it. In 1839, just before returning to England, Hargrave said: "His assistance has been of the greatest value to me, and in my absence he will be the principle conductor of the Depot and the only one there who is capable of performing its Duties."⁵⁸

⁵⁵P.A.C., Hargrave Papers, Mactavish to mother, York Factory, 7 Sep 1840.

⁵⁶Ibid., Mactavish to father, York Factory, Sep 1837.

⁵⁷Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 157, Letitia Hargrave to mother, York Factory, 10 Sep 1843.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 279, James Hargrave to Letitia Mactavish, Red River, 6 Jun 1839; though this letter was written to Mactavish's sister, it still does not exaggerate to any extent.

Hargrave, in fact, became more than merely an appreciative supervisor; he became first a friend, then a relative. Even by 1836, their friendship had deepened to the point where, on learning that Hargrave was being given a year's leave in England, Mactavish insisted he visit his home in Argyllshire. Before leaving York for Red River in August, 1836, Mactavish gave Hargrave a glowing letter of introduction and sent his father another by mail, referring to Hargrave as having "been exceedingly kind & attentive to me" and mentioning that Hargrave was an intimate friend of his uncle's and "almost the only one that I have."⁵⁹

Going on leave during the winter of 1837-38, a year later than planned, Hargrave while visiting Kilchrist House, the Mactavish family home, met William Mactavish's sister, Letitia. Two years later he returned to Scotland, married her, and brought her back to York Factory. Letitia arrived at York on 9 August 1840, and came ashore the next day.⁶⁰ While she was still on board ship her brother rowed out to the roadstead in a small boat and came aboard to see her. After their seven-year separation they barely recognized each

⁵⁹P.A.C., Hargrave Papers, Mactavish to father, Norway House, 15 Aug 1836; Hargrave, thirty-eight years of age, had at that time been in North America twenty years.

⁶⁰Ibid., Mactavish to mother, York Factory, 7 Sep 1840.

other. Letitia, writing home, said his "expression which I think used to be mild, is now knowing and acute."⁶¹

Mactavish reported a month after her arrival that she had had a quick trip over, but that he was so busy he had had little chance to talk with her. She was in good health, though, and "thinks York a better place than she expected. . . . I myself think it will agree with her well enough."⁶²

Letitia soon after her arrival came down with acute homesickness, for which she was roundly berated by Mactavish.⁶³ But her brother, judging by a letter he had written himself three years before, should have been more understanding:

I can recollect every look, methinks almost every word that passed during the last breakfast I had at Kilchrist. I cannot even think of our parting but tears stand in my eyes, & yet I cannot help thinking of it for there is a kind of melancholy pleasure attending it, yet it is so nicely mixed with pain that one cannot tell which exceeds. I recollect coming down stairs & meeting Lockhart, I was in such agony that I hardly knew what I was doing, I seized his hand & squeezed it so violently that the tears ran over his cheeks and the poor little fellow roared out with pain, every trivial little circumstance of this kind that took place as I was leaving home I recollect frequently. . . .

None but those who have experienced it know the pain that is attendant on one's leaving home, and I think

⁶¹Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 58, Letitia Hargrave to mother, York Factory, Sep 1840.

⁶²P.A.C., Hargrave Papers, Mactavish to mother, York Factory, 7 Sep 1840.

⁶³Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 68, Letitia Hargrave to Florence Mactavish, York Factory, 1-5 Sep 1840.

there are few that do but what often wish that they had rather struggled on in their native land, but once that they set out, they will never settle there again, for my own part I never will, should I leave this Country as perhaps I may do (if I can gather as much money as will take me to another) it would only be to go to another part of this continent.⁶⁴

In May of 1840, George Simpson was again thinking of sending Mactavish over the mountains to the Columbia district, to put that district's stores in order then stay there to keep them that way.⁶⁵ But again Simpson was talked out of it, this time by Hargrave, who objected so violently that Simpson was persuaded to delay the move.⁶⁶

A year later Mactavish was appointed General Accountant for the Northern Department, making him second in command at York Factory. Hargrave wrote to his father-in-law, William Mactavish's father: "His charge is a heavy one," but "his application unbounded. I have no anxiety about his filling the office with high credit." Later, writing to J. G. McTavish, Hargrave said that "William gets through his drudgery as General Acct. with great credit to himself considering the small complement to which we have again been reduced here." Though he was still not yet a commissioned officer, Mactavish's

⁶⁴P.A.C., Hargrave Papers, Mactavish to Mary Mactavish, York Factory, 17 Sep 1837.

⁶⁵Letters of Letitia Hargrave, pp. 31-32.

⁶⁶Ibid.

new position apparently entitled him to attend the annual Fur Trade Councils, and he attended his first in 1842.

Mactavish's performance as General Accountant stayed high. Hargrave later wrote to John George McTavish:

My young friend William is indeed the most fit from his ability and information to be placed in this charge as soon as I . . . get out of it. His acquaintance with the whole process of Genl. Requisitions and Outfits for the Trade is in theory as intimate as my own, while in the Genl. Accts. of the country there are none superior to him. . . . William's merits are indeed of the first order & I the more cheerfully agreed to his home trip this fall as it will necessarily make him known to Sir George who I believe has scarcely ever yet seen him & on whom his modest gentlemanly and intelligent mind is sure to make an impression and be of service in presenting him for promotion in which position, both from talents labor and length of servitude he should now stand in the 1st rank.⁶⁷

The trip Hargrave spoke of earlier started in the fall of 1844, when Mactavish, "worn to a shadow,"⁶⁸ went on leave back to England. After spending about six months in England,

⁶⁷Letters of Letitia Hargrave, pp. lxxxv-lxxxvi; Mactavish's career might not have been all that was on Hargrave's mind here. Hargrave had been for years entirely sick of York Factory, and a good deal of his official correspondence was devoted to pleading with Simpson to transfer him elsewhere. Simpson, when he replied at all, usually said something about his being indispensable at York. Mactavish's potentialities as a successor did not escape Hargrave, and no doubt increased his interest in Mactavish's career development. Writing a year later, after having just been promoted to Chief Factor, Hargrave said: "My private plans are to get William into my situation when I leave this place, for which he is in every way well qualified." Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 288, Hargrave to Dugald Mactavish, Sr., York Factory, 22 Aug 1845.

⁶⁸Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. lxxxv.

Mactavish arrived back at York Factory on 29 June 1845, having travelled as far as New York with Governor Simpson.⁶⁹

He was a trifle bitter. He had planned to come back at a different time and by a different route if he was going to have to pay his own way. But Sir George had waited until they were almost back to North America before telling him that he would have to pay his own travelling expenses and furthermore would get no raise in pay that year. "I made no reply but thought the best way for him would have been to have communicated his information about six months sooner."⁷⁰ Earlier, he had said:

Sir George Simpson has most carefully avoided speaking to me about my own affairs, & from his silence I judge I am not to have an addition to my salary, nor am I to be allowed my travelling expenses. I am determined neither to ask the one or the other as I have already brought it under his notice and if he does not like to give it he can keep it.⁷¹

During his visit to England, one of Mactavish's younger brothers, Hector, had been hired by the Company as

⁶⁹P.A.C., Hargrave Papers, Mactavish to father, York Factory, 8 Sep 1845.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹P.A.C., Hargrave Papers, Mactavish to father, Lachine, 27 Apr 1840; the date given this letter, whether by the writer of the letter or its copier, is incorrect. Mactavish did not go on leave to England in 1840, and the letter fits in perfectly with his trip of 1844-45.

a Clerk, had arrived in Canada in the fall of 1844, had gone to his post at Tadoussac, and had drowned shortly thereafter.⁷² George Simpson wrote Dugald Mactavish, Sr., from London on December 17, 1844, telling him of his son's death.⁷³ William Mactavish, writing of the incident in the fall of 1845, quoted his uncle as saying that Hector died on a venture "a prudent man might call rash."⁷⁴ But, Mactavish went on, without such "rashness on the part of the Company's officers Their business could not be conducted. . . . There is no use regretting now but he should never have entered the service. Uncle himself says so most distinctly. It was no place for him or indeed for any one who can work elsewhere."⁷⁵

The matter of Hector's coming to North America had first arisen six years before, when William opposed, his brother Dugald approved, the move.⁷⁶ William wrote his father advising strongly against Hector's coming to Canada, where he was to go under the wing of Dr. Thomas Rae, who William represented as being even younger than Dugald, who

⁷²Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. xcii.

⁷³P.A.C., Hargrave Papers, Simpson to Dugald Mactavish, Sr., London, 17 Dec 1844.

⁷⁴Ibid., Mactavish to father, York Factory, 8 Sep 1845.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶P.A.C., Hargrave Papers, Mactavish to father, York Factory, 1 Sep 1839.

was twenty-two at the time. The argument between William and Dugald is a trifle hard to piece together, but apparently Dugald was arguing against Hector's remaining in Scotland to become a farmer:

Dugald seldom deigns to give arguments for or against any scheme, but deals largely in round assertions or violent philippics, the only argument he gave me against Hector being a farmer, that it was an occupation only fit for a plebean /sic/ not for a Gentleman. This is rather an illiberal notion; but I think myself it is but a drowsy occupation for a young man, besides one may remain but one grade higher than a laborer all his life, without capital & Hector I should think will not be troubled with a superabundance of that article.

But in any case, William went on,

the only means that should be taken to induce him to alter his mind, are fair arguments, not force, as in after life he will be more likely to exert himself energetically under difficulties if he thinks he is only following out the line chalked by himself, than if he were obliged to follow the choice of another for winning his bread.⁷⁷

In November 1845, Mactavish again thought he might be transferred west across the mountains, but again the transfer failed to materialize, for one reason or another, and he stayed at York.⁷⁸

And in 1846 Mactavish was promoted to Chief Trader. His signed Indenture is dated 29 June 1846, but the promotion

⁷⁷Ibid., Mactavish to mother, York Factory, 7 Sep 1840.

⁷⁸Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 215, Letitia Hargrave to mother, York Factory, 30 Nov 1845.

went into effect with Outfit 1846 (1 June 1846).⁷⁹ Mactavish's election to a Chief Tradership had taken place at the Council of 1845.⁸⁰ There is some suggestion that William's promotion was delayed by a shortage of accountants. At least Letitia in 1843 wrote that such was the case because "There is no one in the country who could be made accountant if William were to get charge" of York.⁸¹

Mactavish temporarily took charge of York Factory during the winter of 1846-47 while Hargrave went on leave. On Hargrave's return in 1847 with the ship of the season, Mactavish was to move to Red River.⁸² The ship arrived early in September, but soon after the Hargraves landed the transfer to Red River, like other transfers in the past, was

⁷⁹A.H.B.C., A.6/27, HBC London to Alexander Caulfield Anderson, London, 3 Apr 1846; A.H.B.C., A.33/4, Indenture dated 29 June 1846.

⁸⁰For some reason Hargrave wrote to his father-in-law, Dugald Mactavish, Sr., that Dugald, Jr., had not gotten his promotion when William got his because Dugald's situation had not been so prominent, nor his labors so heavy: Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 288, James Hargrave to Dugald Mactavish, Sr., York Factory, 22 Aug 1845; nevertheless, Dugald was promoted right along with Mactavish, perhaps through an irregular procedure: A.H.B.C., A.6/27, HBC London to Alexander Caulfield Anderson, London, 3 Apr 1846.

⁸¹Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 174, Letitia Hargrave to mother, York Factory, 14-17 Sep 1843.

⁸²P.A.C., Hargrave Papers, Simpson to Mactavish, Norway House, 23 Jun 1847.

cancelled.⁸³

But the following year Mactavish was ordered to attend Council at Norway House, where Sir George Simpson told him that following the meeting of Council he was to leave straight for Sault Ste. Marie to replace John Ballenden. Mactavish would be replaced at York by an accountant named Clouston. A few days later, Simpson changed his mind and sent Mactavish back to York temporarily to train Clouston in some of the more difficult points of handling the York accounts.⁸⁴ Before leaving for Sault Ste. Marie Mactavish wrote home, suggesting that the basis for his geographical preferences had shifted somewhat from the earlier emphasis on career advancement:

" . . . I like my appointment well enough although I daresay it will prove troublesome enough, yet it has the advantage of being a little nearer to the civilized world which in those [sic] times is an advantage."⁸⁵

He set out from York Factory on 16 August 1848 and arrived at the Sault on 1 October after a "rather disagreeable

⁸³Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 292, James Hargrave to Dugald Mactavish, Sr., York Factory, 9 Sep 1847.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 230, Letitia Hargrave to mother, York Factory, 22 Aug 1848.

⁸⁵P.A.C., Hargrave Papers, Mactavish to mother, York Factory, 5 Aug 1848.

voyage of 46 days."⁸⁶ Two weeks at his new station changed his mind about his going there. He wrote home that he was in excellent health but not in good spirits, as he did not like the charge at all, "however I must just make up my mind to it."⁸⁷ Sault Ste. Marie he described as sinking into its former insignificance after a flurry of mining speculation in the area. It was now composed entirely of "the Hud. Bay Co. establishment, the house of the Collector of Customs & a number of hovels belonging to halfbreeds & Canadians, a lazy gang."⁸⁸

But his stay at Sault Ste. Marie was a short one. Less than two years later he was back at York. Arriving there in August, he was described by Letitia as "heavier looking than when he left us but not exactly stout. He seems dull."⁸⁹ Hargrave had finally got the transfer he and Letitia had long sought, and Mactavish had returned to York so Hargrave could prepare him for taking over the post when Hargrave left the following year. As Hargrave wrote to his

⁸⁶Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 239n; P.A.C., Hargrave papers, Mactavish to father, Sault de Ste. Marie, 18 Oct 1848.

⁸⁷P.A.C., Hargrave papers, Mactavish to father, Sault de Ste. Marie, 18 Oct 1848.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. 255, Letitia Hargrave to mother, York Factory, 27-29 Aug 1850.

friend Donald Ross:

The arrival of Mactavish last August was in every way most fortunate. His aid was of the greatest importance to me amidst the crush of ship time--and in course of the winter I then can put into his hands and bring under his notice--the business of the Depot in all its details. With these, his acquaintance is indeed as extended as my own; and, apart from any feelings arising out of our connection, I do not think that the Governor could have made a better selection of one to succeed me--from among the Generation that are to follow us as the senior officers of the service."⁹⁰

The Hargraves left York in the fall of 1851, going on leave in Britain before proceeding to Hargrave's new post at Sault Ste. Marie. Mactavish remained at York until the fall of 1856, when he in turn was relieved by James Hargrave.⁹¹

But Hargrave came alone and grief-stricken. Letitia had died suddenly at Sault Ste. Marie of cholera in 1854. In the meantime, Mactavish had in 1852 been promoted to Chief Factor, after serving only six years as a Chief Trader.⁹² The promotion had gone into effect with Outfit 1852.⁹³

The following year, 1857, Mactavish tried to relieve Hargrave at York again.⁹⁴ Florence Mactavish, one of Letitia's

⁹⁰Ibid., pp. 296-97, James Hargrave to Donald Ross, York Factory, 10 Nov 1850.

⁹¹A.H.B.C., A.6/32, W. G. Smith to Mactavish, London, 21 Jun 1856.

⁹²A.H.B.C., A.33/4, Indenture dated 5 Jul 1852.

⁹³A.H.B.C., A.6/29, Secretary of HBC to Mactavish, London, 7 Apr 1852.

⁹⁴Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. cli.

sisters, was caring for the Hargrave children in Scotland, but she was ill and needed Hargrave's help. Simpson would hear none of it, however, and he said the Company's Directors opposed it also, partly because of a shortage of officers and partly because Hargrave had just come back from leave.⁹⁵

Mactavish returned to England in the fall of 1856, at least partly to testify at an investigation of the Hudson's Bay Company by an Imperial Government Select Committee.⁹⁶ Sir George intended to see to it that Mactavish testified early so he could get back to his new post at Red River, where he was to replace John Swanson as officer in charge of Fort Garry.⁹⁷ Simpson saw no reason why Mactavish should be detained by the investigating committee. As it turned out, Mactavish was detained even less than Simpson expected; he apparently did not testify at all.⁹⁸

⁹⁵Ibid.; Hargrave remained at York until 1858, returned to England, then retired to Canada in 1859. He died there six years later. Commenting sometime after Hargrave's death on the English inheritance taxes on the little Hargrave left in England, Mactavish said: "Faith its no joke to die with money in England--£40 for a stamp": A.H.B.C., A.12/44, Mactavish to Thomas Fraser, Fort Garry, 19 Dec 1865.

⁹⁶A.H.B.C., A.12/8, Simpson to W. G. Smith, Liverpool, 4 Apr 1857.

⁹⁷Ibid.; A.H.B.C., A.11/96, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 6 Sep 1857.

⁹⁸United Kingdom: Report of the Select Committee on the Hudson's Bay Company (London, 1857).

Still, Mactavish's return to Red River was later than George Simpson expected. Sir George, who had been travelling through the west, waited at Fort Garry for some time in the summer of 1857 hoping to see Mactavish on his arrival, but eventually got tired of waiting and returned to Canada. Before leaving, he arranged for Chief Trader Clouston to be sent down from Fort Alexander if Mactavish did not arrive by the end of August.⁹⁹

Mactavish finally arrived at Fort Garry on 10 August 1857,¹⁰⁰ his arrival having perhaps been slowed somewhat by reluctance. Miss Margaret McLeod said Mactavish had always disliked Red River, possibly because of the trouble its constant demands had always given York Factory, and was dismayed at being posted there.¹⁰¹ An additional factor might have been Mactavish's reaction to the Settlers in the colony during the winter he spent there in 1836-37. Added to this, though, was a more material delaying factor--the fact that on his way to St. Paul Mactavish had in one way or another had a good

⁹⁹A.H.B.C., D.4/53, Simpson to Mactavish, Fort Alexander, 5 Jul 1857.

¹⁰⁰A.H.B.C., A.11/96, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 6 Sep 1857.

¹⁰¹Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. cli.

deal of money stolen from him.¹⁰² In any case, Mactavish probably took up his new duties in Red River in a doleful frame of mind; but it was one he would lapse into with great frequency throughout his next thirteen years in the Settlement.

¹⁰²A.H.B.C., D.4/53, Simpson to Mactavish, Lachine, 17 Aug 1857.

CHAPTER III

THE SETTLEMENT

The Red River Settlement that William Mactavish arrived at in 1857 was an odd thing indeed to come upon in the middle of British North America in the mid-nineteenth century. In a vast land where the fur trade was the only major industry, where Indians roamed almost at will, where wild prairie winds and killing winters made life at times unpleasant, even hazardous, the ten thousand people of Red River plodded through the years as they had for decades past, living a life of quiet amid a roaring natural wilderness.

The Settlement was one of those strange children often born and reared through a union of philanthropy and economic interest. Thomas, fifth Earl of Selkirk, bought into the Hudson's Bay Company in 1810 primarily to further his aim of relieving distress in Scotland and Ireland brought on by agricultural revolution by settling displaced Scottish crofters and Irish cotters in settlements in British North America. The Company was persuaded by economic reasons to back the founding of a colony in the North-West. One of the hinges on which the Company's profits swung was transportation, and one transportation cost ever on the increase was that of provisioning the fur trade from England. A settlement in the Red River valley promised to meet the urgent need

for a nearer source of supply. In addition, founding a colony in the area would aid the Company in its competition with the North West Company and strengthen its territorial claims. Moreover, a colony would provide a place of retirement for the Company's servants and their dependents, relieving the posts of the cost of supporting them.¹

But in actual fact the Company never really became convinced of the utility of the colony. Though lowering provisioning costs was highly desirable, establishing a pocket of civilization in the middle of the fur trade empire was not; it might instead of feeding the trade spread and smother it. But once committed, the Company had to maintain as well-ordered a colony as could be cheaply provided. Otherwise, it would merely serve as a base for free traders and outlaws competing with the fur trade and plundering its posts.²

By 1857, the Settlement had grown to about ten thousand people, divided about evenly between French-speaking Catholics and English-speaking Protestants. These two groups roughly halved the Settlement between them. French Catholics occupied the Red River bank for ten to fifteen miles above Fort Garry, and for several miles westward from the Red along sections of the banks of the Assiniboine. English Protestants settled

¹W. L. Morton, Manitoba: A History (Toronto, 1957), p. 44.

²Ibid., p. 68.



other sections along the Assiniboine, and both banks of the Red for about thirty miles below Fort Garry.³ The whole resembled the settlements of Lower Canada, strung along the river, the houses on the bank and cultivated fields stretching behind them.⁴

Trees were relatively scarce. The left bank of the Red was bare for twelve miles down from Fort Garry, and above the fort it was bare except for scattered groves of poplar. The Red's right bank was wooded throughout, but most of the lower Assiniboine was treeless. Lack of trees and level prairies gave a loose rein to the wind, which rode through the Settlement with force and regularity.⁵

Lying in the center of the Red River community was Fort Garry. Though York Factory had remained the headquarters of the Northern Department's accounting department, Upper Fort Garry through the years became increasingly important. It became the residence of the Governor of Rupert's Land, and the distributing point for the Company's new St. Paul route, and eventually replaced York as the Department's most important post. Fort Garry became the primary point of exchange between the traders and hunters, and the point from which were forwarded the outfits for some of the large districts in the

³J. J. Hargrave, Red River (Montreal, 1871), p. 174.

⁴Nor'-Wester, Tuesday, 1 Oct 1861.

⁵Ibid.

interior. Too, because of the growing size of the Settlement, Fort Garry conducted a large local business, trading goods for cash, furs, or country produce; providing banking facilities, and transacting other general business with the Settlers in the community.⁶

The Settlement's economic dependence on the Hudson's Bay Company, in fact, was almost total. Furs were virtually the only significant item of export, and these were exported by the Company. It was the Company that the Settlers had to turn to in one way or another for money to import articles from the outside world, or to buy those imported by the Company. The Company even printed most of the money in use. Though there was always some English and American gold and silver in circulation, money in the Settlement consisted mainly of Hudson's Bay Company notes of five shillings and one pound denomination.⁷ The Nor'-Wester, the local newspaper that first appeared in 1859, pointed out that the notes were not easily recognized outside the territory--a New Yorker "would hesitate to take them at ten cents a dozen"--but the Company's money still was the lifeblood of the Settlement's

⁶Hargrave, Red River, p. 194; Alexander Begg and Walter Nursey, Ten Years in Winnipeg (Winnipeg, 1879), p. 5.

⁷Nor'-Wester, Friday, 16 Sep 1864; Hargrave, Red River, pp. 180, 181.

economy.⁸

But if Fort Garry lay in the center of Red River Settlement, it was far from being the Settlement's nucleus in the usual sense. Red River was, in fact, a small city without a metropolitan center; it was merely ten thousand people scattered along the banks of the rivers. Though the great city of Winnipeg would grow from the Red River Settlement, the future city's nucleus was nothing in 1857 but a rolling prairie. It would be several years before the first building would start the process of filling in the void in the center of Red River, and even ten years after 1857 the tiny village of Winnipeg would be singularly unprepossessing. Isaac Cowie, on arriving at Fort Garry in 1868, passed right through town without noticing it.⁹ The Reverend George Young, arriving the same year with his family, noticed it all too well. Arriving in the Settlement on a day following a storm in July 1868, he painted an unattractive picture:

But what a sorry scene was presented by that long-thought-of town of Winnipeg on the day we entered it! What a mass of soft, black, slippery and sticky Red River mud was everywhere spread out before us! Streets with neither sidewalks nor crossings, with now and again a good sized pit of mire for the traveller to avoid or flounder through as best he could; a few small stores with poor goods and high prices; one little tavern . . . a few passable

⁸Nor'-Wester, Monday, 14 May 1860.

⁹Isaac Cowie, The Company of Adventurers (Toronto, 1913), p. 151.

dwellings . . . neither church nor school in sight or in prospect . . . population about one hundred . . . --such was Winnipeg on July 4th, 1868.¹⁰

But if Young could complain about the paving, the lack of sidewalks, and the shortage of taverns, he could not very well say Red River was in any ordinary sense a frontier community. As W. L. Morton pointed out, by that year the community had had a government, courts, churches, and schools for nearly fifty years.¹¹ It was a settled, civilized society. And at least half the people in it were as settled a group as could be found anywhere.

These were the English-speaking Settlers, mostly Protestant, a small part of them of more or less pure Scotch descent, but most of them Scotch half-breeds, evolving largely from the union of Scotch Hudson's Bay Company employees and variously-affiliated Indians.¹² Since the offspring often married new arrivals from Scotland, the racial strain tended more toward Scotch than Indian, resulting in their reverting more and more to British life and thinking.¹³ With only a few exceptions, these Scotch and Scotch half-breeds were farmers,

¹⁰George Young, Manitoba Memories (Toronto, 1897), pp. 63-64.

¹¹Morton, Begg's Journal, p. 2

¹²Cowie, Company of Adventurers, pp. 64-65.

¹³Ibid.

working their fields year in and year out with every sign of complete contentment. In 1861, the Nor'-Wester described the average English-speaking Settler:

A stranger is always struck with the delightful shyness . . . of the Red River people. There are exceptions, to be sure; but as a rule, they are sweetly modest and unassuming. Take a man of native growth--one whom adventitious circumstances have not warped, and who knows nothing of the artificialities of social life, and what an unobtrusive, retiring creature! He is speechless in the presence of a stranger--while spoken to he scans his hands and feet with annoying concentration--and feels an astonishing relief when you are gone. Speak to him, and he is most courteous--evidently respects himself, yet, in his anxiety to shew you respect, he almost becomes sheepish himself--from regard to your judgment, or from modest distrust of his own, he will not venture on an opinion, but will readily endorse yours, and earnestly hope you may not put him to the necessity of differing from you. All this is the result of isolation . . .¹⁴

--a rather superficial and condescending description, perhaps, and one that might have been based on a somewhat specialized reaction by the Settlers to reporters of the Nor'-Wester; but still it was one with elements of truth. In caricaturing a typical farmer, the newspaper pointed out the Settler's obvious characteristics among strangers. Among friends he was quite different; with all, he was honest, law-abiding, and hard-working, and he clung to the soil with tenacity.

But having grown up as a ward of the Hudson's Bay Company, he lacked the truer independence of the typical

¹⁴Nor'-Wester, Monday, 1 Jul 1861.

farmer. As a Canadian wrote in his diary during the Rebellion in 1869-70, "These men had become so accustomed to letting the company do their thinking for them that they seemed to be unable to do anything for or of themselves."¹⁵ The Nor'-Wester had much earlier complained of this lack of independence:

The colonists as a whole are exceedingly quiet and orderly, law-abiding, and respectful to superiors; so much so, indeed, that they prefer to bear in silence much that they consider as unjust, rather than go to extremes . . . they are not accustomed to combined movements of any kind. The wretched system which denies them participation in the affairs of government has gradually produced a reluctance to action of any kind.¹⁶

The Nor'-Wester here was trying to explain to its Canadian readers why the Settlers did not revolt if the Company's tyranny, of which the newspaper so persistently spoke, was so harsh. Actually, participation in the government was not one of their primary concerns. They wanted a government that ran itself and let them alone. They were detached, being neither for nor against the government, but accepting it passively. If this was an attitude that provided barren soil for political agitation against the government, it was also one that evoked little enthusiasm for government support,

¹⁵P.A.M., J. H. Storer, Rebellion, An Account of P. G. Laurie's Experiences During the Red River Disturbances (an unpublished manuscript containing excerpts from Laurie's diary), p. 7.

¹⁶Nor'-Wester, Friday, 15 Feb 1861.

as the Company was to find out.

The French-speaking Catholics, the Métis, were something else again. Where the English half-breeds were mainly English, the French half-breeds, lacking fresh infusions of French blood, were mainly Indian.¹⁷ The Métis, therefore, in attitudes and makeup tended to drift farther and farther from the European aspect of their origin, though this tendency was retarded somewhat by their fairly solid allegiance to the Catholic Church. But though it was considerably one-sided, they still were proud of their double heritage. Proud of their thin stream of French blood, they were just as proud of the wide one of Indian, the combination leading them to feel they were part of a "New Nation," the rightful rulers of the North-West. They were at least equally proud of their successes in combat. Fearlessly roaming far and wide into Indian country on their thousand-man buffalo hunts, they were often forced to fight off large bands of Sioux behind barricades of carts surrounding their camps. They became known as magnificent horsemen, excellent marksmen, and the bravest and most skillful warriors on the northern plains.¹⁸

Their almost phenomenal success against the savage

¹⁷Cowie, Company of Adventurers, pp. 64-65; the term "Métis" will be used here only to refer to the French-speaking half-breeds.

¹⁸Cowie, Company of Adventurers, pp. 170-71.

Sioux became a staple item for boasting. They were fond of comparing their success against the Sioux with the comparatively few victories, to their knowledge, of the Americans against that tribe. Their pride as warriors broke out elsewhere, too. Cowie pointed out that they considered themselves greatly superior to the English, and pointed to the Seven Oaks massacre of 1816 as a glorious example of their superiority. Courage shown by English half-breeds when fighting with the Métis against the Indians was attributed to their Indian rather than English blood.¹⁹

Still, though concealing beneath the surface a fiery, easily-excited temperament potentially capable of throwing the Settlement into utter chaos, the Métis under normal conditions were quiet and polite. And:

Their honesty and trustworthiness are well known, their hospitality, more especially to each other, is great according to their means. Their extravagance is also, generally speaking, much observed, and their want of perseverance in sedentary pursuits is as remarkable as any of their characteristics.²⁰

They led a vigorous existence. Though almost all had their river front plots of land, a great part of them were

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 392-94

²⁰United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River (London, 1870), p. 25, letter, neither sender nor addressee indicated, Red River Settlement, 6 Nov 1869.

basically either boatmen or buffalo hunters. Farming for these was strictly a sideline, and they were away from the farm most of the summer and fall, scouring the plains for buffalo or paddling the boat brigades that were the lifeline of the fur trade:

The life was hard, but in old age there was a cabin and patch of land by the Red River for the asking and enough pension to provide tobacco, with a dram of rum at the "Big House" in the fort on holidays. No one starved and no one expected to be wealthy.²¹

The buffalo hunt was not only hard, but risky, and Indian conflicts forced on the Métis a discipline that would seem, judging by their free-wheeling behavior elsewhere, to be almost foreign to their nature. This discipline, along with the common tie of the Catholic church, gave them a cohesiveness far more binding than any to be found in the English-speaking part of the Settlement. And this, along with their slightly greater numbers and far greater fighting prowess, made them potentially a much more powerful factor in Red River affairs than any other group in the Settlement.

But if their semi-nomadic existence by welding them together gave them great potential influence, it robbed them of immediate influence. Not only was a large part of the

²¹Douglas MacKay, The Honourable Company (New York, 1936), p. 293.

Metis male population away from the Settlement during most of the summer and fall but their way of life was not conducive to education. The great majority was illiterate. A gentleman named H. Cook, comparing the English and French half-breeds, said: "The majority of the crews of my boats were French; but never yet in nine years have I met with one who could sign his name. . . . Out of the same number of English, it would be hard to find one that could not do it."²² A. C. Garrioch, speaking much later, said that out of the hundreds of Metis supporting Riel in Fort Garry during the uprising, the number who could read or write was an insignificant minority.²³ It was an ignorance that led to credulity and exploitation; the Metis would often believe what was told them by people they trusted no matter how distorted it was. And it was an ignorance that later gave Louis Riel the lever he needed to raise and sustain the Rebellion in 1869 and keep it going for ten long months on little more than his own rhetoric.

And if the strength of the Metis was based mainly on the buffalo hunt, it was a strength that could only decline. The buffalo were gradually moving west, out of reach of the Metis in the Settlement. The time was not long off when the

²²Nor'-Wester, Saturday, 14 Apr 1860.

²³A. C. Garrioch, The Correction Line (Winnipeg, 1933), pp. 291-92.

Métis would either have to follow the buffalo west, leaving the Settlement for good, or settle down on the farms along the river that they heretofore had treated primarily as places to stay between hunts. The Métis working on the boat and cart brigades faced a similar choice, though it might have been a little farther off. And though their settling down to the life of farmers might have increased their religious cohesiveness, a goal their Roman Catholic priests were working for with might and main, the spirit born of their wild way of life would within a few years almost certainly have been plowed into the soil.

So the Métis and the English-speaking Settlers were in many ways a study in contrasts. In a deeper sense, though, they represented opposite faces on the same coin; over all this divergency there lay a similarity of sentiment:

Different as these men might be in ethnic background, temperament and language, they all had one thing in common: dislike of change. They did not want to face new problems and new adjustments. They sought no more struggles and wrenchings. They were still too close to the basic fundamentals of wresting their living from a grudging land and an inhospitable climate, still too close to the floods and the plagues and the knife-edge of famine.²⁴

Another reason for their not wanting change was their satisfaction with things as they were. Isaac Cowie, describing the Settlement extensively, said he thought there

²⁴G. F. G. Stanley, Louis Riel (Toronto, 1963), pp. 9-10.

could not be a more contented community anywhere. Each lived on his own land, rent free. He could hunt, fish, and shoot without restriction. He had building material and firewood for the cutting and hauling. His animals roamed on free pasture. There was hay in abundance. Everyone could get clothing, shelter and plenty of good substantial food, and a rich man could buy little that his poorer neighbor might envy. Even the churches and schools were largely supported by contributions raised in the old country, from many classes of people some of whom were in much less prosperous circumstances than themselves.²⁵

Thus, perhaps largely out of contentment:

The Red River community, French and Scottish, was a static rather than a creative one. It was one in which men, whether they spoke English or French, whether they attended cathedral or kirk, grew up and embraced life as they saw it, not as they wished it to be. . . . The Red River people were a free people, but they were not an articulate one; they were a dogmatic people despising abstract speculations; the life they lived was a simple one, uncomplicated rather than primitive.²⁶

In short, a poor climate for politics of any kind.

Politics, in fact, was what the Red River of 1857 had little of, and what there was was as peculiar as the Settlement itself. Government authority emanated from the Governor and Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company in London, but

²⁵Cowie, Company of Adventurers, pp. 158-60.

²⁶Stanley, Louis Riel, pp. 9-10.

practical government issued from the Governor and Council of Assiniboia. The Governor of Assiniboia was appointed by the Company, as were members of the Council on the Governor's recommendation. The Governor convened the Council and presided over its sittings, but he had only one vote to cast, no veto power, and in no way carried any more weight in the Council than any of the other members. Measures took effect from the moment they were proclaimed, and though the Governor and Committee in London had a veto power they almost never used it. Justice was administered by a General Quarterly Court, headed by the President of the Courts or the Recorder of Rupert's Land, and several summary courts. Under the Recorder were a number of justices of the peace. The law was based on English common law, supplemented by local statutes needed for the community.²⁷

Largely judicial in its early years, the Council of Assiniboia gradually took on an increasingly legislative character. As the years passed, the work of the Council reached farther and farther into the life of the community, passing laws on everything from fires and hay to surveys and the sale of intoxicating liquor to Indians. Civil offices were set up to carry out the Council's regulations and

²⁷Hargrave, Red River, pp. 85-92; see Appendices D and E.

operate postal and customs facilities.²⁸ As the Council became more involved in regulating local life, its meetings became more frequent. During the 1859-69 period, the Council met twice as often as it had during the 1847-59 period, and four times as often as during the 1835-46 period.²⁹

Considering its shaky foundation, the government was amazingly successful. Neither a dictatorship nor a democracy, lacking the power necessary for dictatorship and the political freedom of democracy, it was an oligarchy appointed by a theoretical dictator that seemed excellently to meet the needs of the Settlement. Though it might have fallen short on providing civil protection, it did provide as much government as the Settlement needed without needlessly cramping its freedom. The Settlement got a paternal oligarchy in the best senses of "paternal" and "oligarchy"; it ran not on authoritarianism but consent. Members of the Council were chosen from among the most respected and intelligent citizens in the Settlement, and most Councillors were appointed because the population wanted them. In short, the Settlement got what almost amounted to representative government without having to pay the high price representative government would have charged. And if the Settlers had little actual voice in

²⁸Stanley, The Birth of Western Canada (Toronto, 1936) p. 16.

²⁹E. H. Oliver (ed.), The Canadian North-West (Ottawa, 1914), I, p. 37.

the government, little was all they wanted.

It was a settlement of unusual people with an unusual government, but one that would drastically affect the life of William Mactavish. Before moving to Red River, Mactavish had been nothing more than a fur trader. In Red River he would shortly become a public figure, and if not a controversial one himself at least one occupying a controversial position. And, a year and a half after moving to Red River, he firmly planted his roots in the Settlement by marrying Mary Sarah McDermot, the fourth daughter of a family of nine girls and six boys raised by the Settlement's leading free trader, Andrew McDermot.³⁰ The new Mrs. Mactavish, Catholic and part Indian, had been born sometime between 1828 and 1841, which if placing her rather vaguely made her at least thirteen years younger than her husband.³¹ The marriage represented a departure from Mactavish's earlier attitude on marrying in general and on marrying Indian or half-breed women in particular. As noted earlier, Mactavish had intended never to marry. And though he at no time made any derogatory comments about the practice among many of the officers of the fur trade of marrying Indian or half-breed women, he recog-

³⁰W. J. Healy, Women of Red River (Winnipeg, 1923), pp. 131-32; Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. clii.

³¹Healy, Women of Red River, p. 132; see Appendix F for details on McDermot family.

nized the drawbacks of such a marriage. He saw that these marriages often served to bar forever the return of the fur trader with his family to "civilization."

With his usual reticence concerning his personal affairs, Mactavish neglected to spread the news of his marriage very promptly. His brother, Dugald, out on the west coast, heard a rumor of the marriage late in the year and mentioned it to Simpson.³² Simpson replied that he had heard regularly from Mactavish but that he had made no mention of a marriage. Later, Simpson picked up more details, and wrote Dugald Mactavish: "I presume he was occupied with domestic affairs, having just taken McDermot's daughter to wife."³³ Finally, Simpson heard of it from Mactavish, some three or four months after the event took place:

The information you convey of your marriage, had reached me some weeks before, indirectly; nobody wrote to me from the Settlement on the subject--I trust the step may have conduced to your comfort and happiness.³⁴

A shred of detail of the marriage comes from a letter by one of the Company's officers, J. E. Harriot, writing on 8 December 1858:

³²A.H.B.C., D.4/55, Simpson to Dugald Mactavish, Lachine, 16 Dec 1858.

³³A.H.B.C., D.4/84, Simpson to Dugald Mactavish, Lachine, 2 Feb 1859.

³⁴A.H.B.C., D.4/84A, Simpson to Mactavish, Lachine, 22 Mar 1859.

There has been a good deal of Stir in the Settlement since you left from the arrival of Lords Honorable and all sorts of folks much to the annoyance of Mr. McTavish and it was only a day or two ago that we found out the cause, on hearing that one cold morning he had gone across the River and got married to Miss McDermot. She (we are told) only made her formal entrance into the Fort last Wednesday. We have not been up since but intend to call upon them as soon as we can.³⁵

In the coming years William and Sarah Mactavish were to have at least four children. A boy, James, "a thundering chap," was born in 1860.³⁶ Twin daughters named Mary and Florence were born on 13 February 1861.³⁷ Later, an Andrew Dougal appeared.³⁸

Though Mactavish remained a Protestant, his wife's religion brought him into much closer ties with the Catholic church in the Settlement. Dugas pointed out that "Quoique protestant, il ne manifestait aucun fanatisme contre les

³⁵Clifford Wilson, "Private Letters from the Fur Trade," Papers of the Manitoba Historical Society, Series III, 1950, J. E. Harriot to William McMurray, Red River, 8 Dec 1858.

³⁶Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. clii; Healy, Women of Red River, p. 35.

³⁷Healy, Women of Red River, p. 35; Nor'-Wester, Friday, 15 Feb 1861.

³⁸St. Thomas, Ontario, Times-Journal, 7 Mar 1951, in library of Hudson's Bay House, Winnipeg, courtesy of Mrs. Shirlee Smith; see Appendix A.

catholiques; il avait même épousé une catholique et il confiait l'éducation de ses enfants aux maisons catholiques."³⁹

And when new bells were hung in the second St. Boniface Cathedral in the mid-1860's, three of Mactavish's children, James, Mary, and Florence, were chosen as godfather and godmothers of three of them.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Mactavish kept up his connection with the Presbyterian Church. He and his family attended the Kildonan Church regularly, sitting in what was called "the Hudson's Bay pew."⁴¹

Mactavish's marrying one of the daughters of a man who had a total of nine of them, as well as six sons, was a move guaranteed to provide him with a good set of relations in Red River, particularly as the daughters married. One daughter married another Company man stationed at Fort Garry, James McKay. Another married one of the leading free traders in the Settlement, A. G. B. Bannatyne. Others were scattered here and there around the Settlement. It was a fortunate arrangement, for Mactavish would need all the support he could muster.

Marriage and new responsibilities were to have their

³⁹Georges Dugas, Le Mouvement Des Métis (Montreal, 1909), p. 47: "Though Protestant, he was not anti-Catholic; his own wife was a Catholic and he trusted the education of his children to Catholic homes"; (translated by author).

⁴⁰Healy, Women of Red River, p. 35

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 72-73.

effect on Mactavish. A few months after his marriage, he was described by Manton Marble, a magazine article writer who visited the Settlement. Mactavish's:

figure is tall, and his head finely shaped with a broad, high brow, which, without particularly jutting eyebrows, gives you the impression of mental calibre. The wrinkles upon his forehead and face are such as care, not age, accounts for, and are set-off by the Palmerstone style of whisker and a heavy moustache, together with long sandy hair, in which the streaks of gray are only beginning to appear. His manner had the quiet, well-bred tone oftener found among Englishmen than others, and his voice is low from the same cause or from some bronchial infection. Energy, determination, and executive ability were the obvious characteristics of the man. What we had before learned of his culture and tastes was confirmed by the books which we saw lying on the table and book-cases."⁴²

Marble went on to say that Mactavish treated him with "great courtesy," and responded to questions "with an unfailing freedom and sincerity. In some of the Canadian Commissioners' reports," he said, "the reticence and misrepresentations of the Company's officers are dwelt upon, but in this quarter at least -- and it is the highest in the settlement -- we found neither."⁴³

Mactavish's quiet manner had been impressing his friends since his arrival in North America. James Hargrave

⁴²Nor'-Wester, Friday, 15 Mar 1861; paper quotes from "To Red River and Beyond, Part III," article by Manton Marble in Harper's New Monthly Magazine for "previous month."

⁴³Ibid.

had described him as "quiet and unobtrusive, yet spirited,"⁴⁴ and a young ship's doctor visiting York Factory named John Sebastian Helmcken said Mactavish was "'sandy,' pleasant but not talkative--a thinking man."⁴⁵ The intellectual life Marble suggested was commented on earlier by his sister, Letitia. Mactavish and a Dr. Tolmie had become friends while Tolmie was visiting York, and Letitia described them as:

both being what ordinary people call dreamers They are much bent on the improvement of human nature & are phrenologists & adherents of Combe, author of the Constitution of Man. Tolmie has had opportunities of judging for himself & for want of other means William has made himself acquainted with the notions of every one who has got into difficulties with Church or State for being too far in advance of the world. I suppose this has made the Doctor think more of William than of Dugald /William's brother/, but their general character is equal, Willie being considered the greatest & hardest worker as well as having the best head.⁴⁶

Mactavish was also in many respects still much as Letitia had described him elsewhere. He still clung to high standards, excusing nothing lower in others, a somewhat puritan characteristic that at least prevented him from over-estimating others.⁴⁷ And, as Letitia pointed out, what he said did not always express his real feelings, nor chart his

⁴⁴Letters of Letitia Hargrave, p. lxix.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. cviii

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 118, Letitia Hargrave to father, York Factory, 8 Sep 1842.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. lxxxvi-lxxxvii.

course of action.⁴⁸ This would increase in the coming years, as greater confidence and experience introduced an outspokenness that gradually drowned out the quiet manner observers seem to have found in the younger Mactavish. Still, though his tongue might be on occasion ruled by the emotion of the moment, his actions were generally the product of considered judgment.

Like the quiet manner, the high standards he judged others by would suffer in the coming years; he would need to be the "greatest & hardest worker as well as having the best head." More than that he would need patience, forbearance, good judgment, and a self-sacrificing dedication to understanding and compromise that would seem on occasion to cut into his high personal standards. The Settlement, in fact, during the coming years would ask of Mactavish pretty much all he had to give. And in doing so it would give Mactavish little in return.

⁴⁸Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

THE COMPANY AND THE GOVERNMENT

Mactavish entered on his new task at Red River much as he had most of his other charges in the past, with an air of dissatisfaction. Soon after taking over at Fort Garry, he wrote to Simpson exuding pessimism and complaining about the hard work. Simpson replied:

I can well understand that you feel worried and over taxed in your new charge, but I trust, after you bring things into something like the systematic order you have been accustomed to see elsewhere: that the business will go on more pleasantly. There are many reforms required, especially in the office, where laxity to a culpable extent prevails; the only wonder is how the accounts are kept at all or the cash made to balance. If well managed, the office work would be very greatly reduced.¹

Though the conditions at Fort Garry that Simpson referred to were to some extent the fault of the preceding officer-in-charge, some of the staff Mactavish inherited were generally incompetent. Simpson wrote in March 1858: "Your staff at Fort Garry will require to be completely remoddled [sic] this season. I shall consider the subject before we meet."² It was a problem that was to remain for a good while longer, and one that Mactavish was not hesitant about bringing to Sir

¹A.H.B.C., D.4/53, Simpson to Mactavish, Lachine, 21 Oct 1857.

²A.H.B.C., D.4/54, Simpson to Mactavish, Lachine, 16 Mar 1858.

George's attention, along with the usual comments on hard work. The problem, though, was that better men were not available. In June 1860, Simpson said:

Your staff, I fear, is an inefficient one, but I have no one disposable to send up as Accountant or Salesman. It is not right so much of the drudgery should fall on you. If there be any man at York or anywhere else within reach who you think would be an acquisition at Fort Garry, you have my full authority to move him thither.³

But in the meantime, Mactavish's reasons for dissatisfaction had multiplied several times over. He had not been in Red River a year and a half before he found himself the Settlement's new Governor of Assiniboia, the previous Governor, Francis Godschall Johnson, having retired under slightly mysterious circumstances. Johnson had been Recorder of Rupert's Land (Chief Judge) when on 19 July 1855, on the order of Governor-in-chief George Simpson, he was sworn in as Deputy Governor of Assiniboia.⁴ The move had been prompted by the British Army's plan to recall Major W. B. Caldwell, Governor of Assiniboia and commander of a small force of Pensioners supposedly providing a military force for the Settlement.⁵ After Caldwell left, Johnson as Deputy Governor

³A.H.B.C., D.4/57, Simpson to Mactavish, Lachine, 29 Jun 1860.

⁴A.H.B.C., A.11/96, Johnson to W. G. Smith, London, Jun 1856.

⁵Ibid.

acted as Governor until 27 February 1856, when his commission as Governor arrived and he was sworn in.⁶ Even after his official appointment as Governor he continued to act as Recorder of Rupert's Land.

Johnson's reign was an uneventful one, a circumstance that Simpson laid to the presence of the detachment of Royal Canadian Rifles that had arrived in 1857.⁷ In spite of this tranquillity, Johnson suddenly, on 28 June 1858, sent in his letter of resignation. The resignation was to take effect at the end of November 1858, when a three-months' leave of absence he had been granted was to expire.⁸ The reasons he gave for resigning were a trifle vague, but one of them was money. He felt that his salary, watered-down as it was by the high cost of living in the Settlement, was not enough to support him in the manner demanded, he thought, by his civic position. Furthermore, he mentioned insecurity existing because of the possible consequences of the possible transfer of the territory to Canada. Whether this insecurity was Johnson's or just a general insecurity is not clear. The main

⁶Ibid.; the commission was dated 29 November 1855.

⁷A.H.B.C., A.12/9, Simpson to Thomas Fraser, Lachine, 28 Aug 1858.

⁸A.H.B.C., A.11/96, Johnson to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 28 Jun 1858.

reason, though was, as he put it, that Sir George Simpson had decided that because of the cramped conditions at Fort Garry caused by the quartering of the troops there Johnson would for an unspecified time not be able to have his family with him. Presumably, they would have to remain in Canada.⁹

Johnson left Red River on the evening of 19 August 1858, heading over the plains for Canada.¹⁰ His departure was unlamented by Simpson. A month later, Sir George wrote:

I understand it is not improbable that Mr. Johnson, late Governor and Recorder of Assiniboia, may address the Board direct, requesting he may be permitted to withdraw his notice of retirement from the Company's service. With every good feeling towards Mr. Johnson, I must say that I think it would not be well to send that gentleman back to the country, as, although very talented, there is a levity, a want of steadiness, and (it is proper you should confidentially know) a want of truthfulness about him which renders him less useful in the offices he held at Red River than he ought have been.¹¹

He went on to say that Johnson could easily be replaced in Canada. The "want of truthfulness" Sir George speaks of apparently referred to Johnson's complaint about his family having to stay in Canada for an indefinite length of time because of the shortage of space at Fort Garry. Three weeks

⁹Ibid., Johnson to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 29 Jun 1858.

¹⁰Ibid., Johnson to Fraser, Montreal, 25 Sep 1858.

¹¹A.H.B.C., A.12/9, Simpson to H. H. Berens, Lachine, 25 Sep 1858.

before Johnson's resignation, Simpson had written to Mactavish as follows:

If Mr. Johnson returns to Red River alone furnish him two rooms and a kitchen (say those occupied by Mr. Thom) at the lower Fort. with stabling and forage for one horse, to mess himself. / Thom was a former Recorder at Red River. / If he brings back his family he may have all the rooms Mr. Thom occupied unfurnished.¹²

The charge of "levity" is unsubstantiated by Johnson's correspondence, which tended more toward evangelical solemnity.

The circumstances justify a lingering suspicion that Simpson was not presenting the whole case. Johnson's resignation took place soon after Sir George visited him in the Settlement, and it would seem that Johnson seriously misunderstood something that Simpson had said during the visit, or that a great deal more passed between the two men at that time than came out in the official correspondence. There is the chance, too, that Johnson did not intend to leave the job but was merely trying to pressure the Company into granting him better terms. In any case, Johnson did not return.

Before Johnson's retirement, Mactavish had been sent a special commission making him "Vice Governor of Assiniboia" during Johnson's vacation in Canada.¹³ The commission was to be used in a strictly limited sense. A shipment of goods

¹²A.H.B.C., D.4/54, Simpson memorandum to Mactavish, Fort Garry, 9 Jun 1858.

¹³Ibid.

sent from England and coming by way of New York and St. Paul was expected to arrive in the Settlement in the autumn of 1858 and, as Simpson explained to the Governor and Committee, "the Commission though general, was specially intended to enable him to discharge the bond given to the American Customs by the Company he will make no other use of the authority conferred upon him."¹⁴

When Johnson's vacation lengthened into retirement, Simpson suggested:

For the consideration of the Governor and Committee, whether it might not be advisable to transmit to Mr. Mactavish a commission as Governor of Assiniboia, so as to enable that gentleman to preside at the Councils of that district, until the Governor & Committee have time to mature their plans, connected with the Settlement in reference to pending negotiations with Her Majesty's Government.¹⁵

If, on the other hand, Simpson went on, the Governor and Committee wanted to combine the positions of Recorder and Governor, Simpson said he would look around for someone capable of handling both jobs.

Mactavish received his Commission as Governor of Assiniboia in November 1858.¹⁶ Later, he was granted, also

¹⁴A.H.B.C., A.12/9, Simpson to Gov, Dep Gov, and Comm of HBC, Norway House, 24 Jun 1858.

¹⁵Ibid., Simpson to Fraser, Lachine, 28 Aug 1858.

¹⁶A.H.B.C., A.6/33, Fraser to Mactavish, London, 4 Oct 1858.

at Simpson's recommendation, an extra 200 pounds a year for acting as Governor of Assiniboia, the same amount that had been paid Alexander Christie and Duncan Finlayson for the job.¹⁷

But if Johnson in the end left his post as Governor of Assiniboia reluctantly, his successor entered it the same way. On receiving his commission, Mactavish wrote back to London: "I would have preferred had my Employers seen fit to appoint another to the office as although I feel highly flattered by this proof of their confidence I am sensible that to conduct the business of the Trade here is alone full occupation for me."¹⁸ This attitude deepened with experience. Eleven years later, in the Spring of 1869, Mactavish was quoted on the subject of managing both the trade and the Settlement as saying, "with an emphasis transcending profanity," that he "had rather be a stoker in hell."¹⁹

It was a sentiment he would re-register periodically through the years. In November 1861, the Governor of the

¹⁷A.H.B.C., A.12/10, Simpson to Fraser, Lachine, 18 Apr 1859; Ibid., Simpson to Fraser, Lachine, 28 Feb 1859.

¹⁸A.H.B.C., A.11/96, Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 11 Dec 1858.

¹⁹P.A.C., Taylor Papers, draft of letter to be written to Toronto Globe, by Taylor, 18 May 1869.

Company, H. H. Berens, wrote to A. G. Dallas that "McTavish is most anxious to be relieved of the duties as Governor."²⁰

In 1868, Mactavish wrote:

My difficulties arise from my being Governor of Assiniboia. I am constantly called to attend to matters connected with the Colony when I should be taken up with business more properly belonging to the trade. My cases are generally small, scarcely worth speaking of yet to leave them alone would expose me perhaps to serious troubles afterwards as the folks here are exacting and there is a party ready to turn any hostile feelings to account. I trust however before long some arrangement may be made which will relieve the Company's officers here, and once clear of the government of the settlement the trade business will become more simple. At present the trade suffers from being connected with the Government as dissatisfaction in one of them is immediately felt in the other.²¹

That the constant detail was one of the things bothering

Mactavish is clear:

I continue to have a series of miserable petty cases arising from the circumstances I am placed in here, which are rapidly disgusting me with the whole business. There is nothing in itself sufficient to amount to the dignity of a case and can only be called a worry. Still they are vexatious and wearing and with failing health have embittered life itself to me. I must however bear and forbear for a while but that desire to get apparently two small pages of this letter missing here, then me scarcely knows whether he should feel angry or not, really the thing is too ludicrous. I hope something may be settled in regard to the Country. if it is not you may look for notice of my own retirement

²⁰A.H.B.C., A.7/3, H. H. Berens to Dallas, London, 21 Nov 1861.

²¹A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish probably to W. G. Smith, 12 May 1868.

to be given to the Council in terms of the Deed Poll.²² And in a fragment from either this same letter or another of the same date and addressee, Mactavish said: "for my own part I feel my position perfectly intolerable and I most sincerely hope that I may be soon relieved from duties which have always been disagreeable and are now becoming perfectly disgusting."²³ This dislike of his job was at least partly behind his regular calls for a different form of government in the Settlement.²⁴

But whether he liked it or not, and though he did not realize it, Mactavish had been dragged onto the main stage of history. Heretofore, he had been a competent officer of the Hudson's Bay Company in North America. As such, he had enjoyed and would have continued to enjoy what to any outside observer would have appeared a quite successful career. When he became a Chief Factor in 1852, his pay rose to an average of nearly one thousand pounds yearly, a considerable amount of money in those days, particularly since many of his living expenses were paid for. But with his appointment to the office of Governor of Assiniboia,

²²A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, 28 Apr 1868.

²³Ibid., Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 28 Apr 1868.

²⁴Ibid., Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 20 Jan 1868.

Mactavish's career radically changed categories. Where as a Chief Factor in the fur trade little would have been asked of him except competence in business, as Governor of Assiniboia political ability was demanded. The rewards changed, too. His business career had offered him money; politics offered him a chance to demonstrate greatness as a leader. By the same token, in business he could lose only money; in politics, even while doing his best, he could lose his reputation; and his reputation, at least his reputation for honesty, integrity, and independence, was of considerable importance to Mactavish, and its coming almost continually under fire during the next twelve years was to become one of Mactavish's chief sources of torment.

He attended his first Council meeting as Governor on 9 December 1858, and from the start did well in his dual role of Governor of Assiniboia and officer-in-charge of Fort Garry. Simpson reported in June 1859:

It affords me much satisfaction to say that I found Red River Settlement in a perfectly tranquil state. The Company's affairs, under Chief Factor William Mactavish's judicious management are conducted in a systematic and economical manner, but with an activity and energy suited to the changing character of the business and the great competition experienced in the trade.²⁵

Much of the calm still must be credited to the detachment of

²⁵A.H.B.C., A.12/10, Simpson to Gov, Dep Gov, and Comm of HBC, Norway House, 21 Jun 1859.

Royal Canadian Rifles stationed at Fort Garry. But later in the year Simpson heaped praises on Mactavish's shoulders as a Company, rather than civil, officer. Saying that few of the Company's officers were capable of making the complex arrangements for the transport of freight from St. Paul to Red River and beyond, Simpson wrote:

We were fortunate this season in having our transport under the control of two thoroughly efficient officers, --C. F. Wm. Mactavish and Mr. James McKay; but I should be at a great loss to replace either, in the event of their services not being available another season.²⁶

But the St. Paul route and the fur trade were to concern Sir George Simpson for only nine more months. Though not yet recovered from a recent illness, Simpson started out in May 1860 for the annual Council of the Northern Department, to be held that year at Fort Garry. He got as far as St. Paul, decided he could not go on, and stopped to rest before turning back.²⁷ While still at St. Paul, he wrote Mactavish telling him to act in his stead as President of the Council. Under no circumstances, however, was Mactavish to make any major changes in personnel or policy, and detailed instructions were included for handling the Council and the various points Simpson thought would be

²⁶Ibid., Simpson to Fraser, Lachine, 9 Dec 1859.

²⁷Ibid., Simpson to Mactavish, St. Paul, 21 May 1860.

brought up at it.²⁸ Though these detailed instructions could be taken as showing a certain lack of confidence in Mactavish, they more likely represented merely the action of a good executive in properly delineating the authority of a subordinate in his absence. Besides, after returning to Lachine, Simpson wrote Mactavish again: "in my absence the duty devolved on you as Senior Chief Factor; and also as the only member of Council to whom I felt the business could be safely entrusted."²⁹ Two months later, Sir George was dead. Three days after entertaining the Prince of Wales at his house in Dorval he suffered an apoplectic stroke, and died within the week.³⁰ He was buried four days later, on 11 September 1860, at Christ's Church Cathedral, Montreal.³¹

William Mactavish immediately became Acting Governor of Rupert's Land, the ranking officer in the North American fur trade. Back in August, 1857, when Mactavish arrived at Fort Garry to take charge of that post, waiting for him had been a commission as Councillor in the Council of Assiniboia.³²

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹A.H.B.C., D.4/57, Simpson to Mactavish, Lachine, 29 Jun 1860.

³⁰E. E. Rich, The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870 (London, 1959), II, p. 810.

³¹A.H.B.C., D.5/52.

³²A.H.B.C., A.6/32, W. G. Smith to Mactavish, London, 3 Jul 1857.

A sealed packet had accompanied the commission. It was probably this sealed packet that contained a commission dated 9 June 1857 appointing Mactavish Acting Governor of Rupert's Land in the event of Simpson's death.³³ As soon as the Governor and Committee learned of Sir George's death, they wrote Mactavish reminding him that his commission was in force and that he should be prepared to act in his new capacity "in case of emergency."³⁴

But they took pains to make sure Mactavish understood that he was not to act unnecessarily on his new authority:

. . . you will consider yourself empowered, in virtue of your Commission as Acting Governor, to issue such orders as would, in other circumstances, have emanated from Sir George Simpson, and to do such other acts as you may consider necessary for the proper carrying on of the business of the Company.

And what Mactavish became Acting Governor of was not what Simpson had been Governor of:

It is, however, not the wish of the Governor and Committee that you should make any change which is not absolutely necessary for carrying temporarily on the affairs of the Company. They do not think that it will be at all necessary for you to put yourself to the trouble of leaving your present post, or of proceeding to Lachine. The affairs of the Montreal Department will remain, for the present, under the charge of Chief Factor Hopkins, whose one and twenty years acquaintance with the affairs of that department peculiarly fit him for the temporary management of the business of the establish-

³³A.H.B.C., A.6/35, Fraser to Mactavish, London, 28 Sep 1860.

³⁴Ibid.

ment on the system followed by the lamented deceased.³⁵

The Western Department became "independent" at about the same time, leaving only the all-important Northern Department and the much less important Southern Department under the Acting Governor of Rupert's Land. The job and the title Governor-in-chief of Rupert's Land had been created expressly for George Simpson. In extent, if not in name, the job died with Simpson. The Company had already entered into a "holding action" phase, anticipating the early transfer of the territory to Canada, and was not again to appoint an over-all supervisor of the fur trade in North America even two years later, when it thought at first it might have found a suitable successor to George Simpson. The Governor of the Company, H. H. Berens, writing Simpson unknowingly a week after he had died, referred to Simpson's plans to retire in 1861 and expressed concern over where they would find a successor. Berens said, however, that he hoped they might be able to talk Alexander Grant Dallas, a member of the Board of Directors, into it.³⁶

While the Company went about the task of finding a successor for Simpson, Mactavish carried on, evidently to the satisfaction of the Company. The Governor and Committee,

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶A.H.B.C., A.7/3, H. H. Berens to Simpson, London, 14 Sep 1860.

writing a general letter in April 1861, referred to the opening of the St. Paul route to Red River, and the influx of petty traders this had brought, then said that in spite of these increased difficulties the Settlement had remained calm, with no disturbances, and the Company's business had been conducted the past year with its usual regularity and success. "Most of this success," they went on, "is owing to the judicious management of Chief Factor William Mactavish who, we are happy to say, continues to occupy his difficult post with activity and intelligence."³⁷

The troops had not yet left, but Mactavish's "difficult post" was getting more difficult all the time. At the time of the writing of the letter he was officer-in-charge of Fort Garry, Governor of Assiniboia, and Governor of Rupert's Land. A little later in the year, on the death of John Bunn, the acting Recorder, Mactavish became for a while President of the Courts. It was irony with a vengeance--a man who often disliked having one job, and hated having two, found himself with four.

But he was to lose two of them simultaneously a year later. Though "the question of the appointment of a successor to Sir George Simpson is one of great difficulty and

³⁷A.H.B.C., A.6/36, Gov and Comm to Mactavish, London, 17 Apr 1861.

delicacy,"³⁸ the Governor and Committee thought they found the answer in 1861, when they persuaded A. G. Dallas to take over the job of Governor of Rupert's Land. Conveying this news to Mactavish in November 1861, Fraser, the Company's Secretary, said:

The Board have every reason to feel satisfied with the ability, zeal and activity which you have brought to bear in the fulfilment of this mission Acting Governor of Rupert's Land. They are quite aware that the duties which have thus devolved upon you have added greatly to the labours and responsibility which fell to your share in your ordinary occupation of Officer in Charge of Red River District and Governor of Assiniboia, and they direct me to convey to you their best thanks for your ready and useful co-operation upon all occasions. You have already communicated to the Board your anxiety to be relieved of the double duty and they have for some time past felt that you were well entitled to the relief, but circumstances over which they had no control have caused delay and thrown difficulties in the way of the appointment of a permanent Governor which has only very lately been overcome.

I have now, however, the pleasure to inform you that Alexander Grant Dallas Esq, one of the present Directors of the Company, has agreed to undertake the duties of Governor of Rupert's Land, and that he has accordingly been appointed to that Office by the Board.³⁹

Dallas had been a junior partner in the firm of Jardine, Matheson & Co., trading in Shanghai for several years before retiring and moving to San Francisco in 1854. He married a daughter of James Douglas, a company officer and later Governor of British Columbia, and was made a Chief Factor at

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹A.H.B.C., A.6/36, Fraser to Mactavish, London, 27 Nov 1861.

Victoria.⁴⁰ The Company apparently used him in a special capacity, also, as he was later found acting under the rather splendid titles of "Director of the Company, and President of Council in North America."⁴¹ Since this was before Dallas took a seat on the Board, and before he became, as Governor of Rupert's Land, President of the Council of the Northern Department, it is not clear exactly what council Dallas was president of. In any case, from there, Dallas moved to London as a Director of the Company, then returned to North America as Governor of Rupert's Land.

Choosing Red River as his principal residence, apparently at the direction of the Company, Dallas arrived in the Settlement on 18 May 1862⁴² and made his first appearance at a Council meeting on 4 June.⁴³ He brought with him John Black, who was to relieve Mactavish of his responsibility as President of the Red River Courts.

Where Sir George Simpson had generally left the supervision of the Settlement up to the Governor of Assiniboia, Dallas showed early that he intended to exert a decided

⁴⁰Rich, The Hudson's Bay Company, p. 813.

⁴¹Oliver, Canadian North-West, I, pp. 49-50; A.H.B.C., D.5/52, San Francisco Daily Alta California, 29 May about 1860.

⁴²Alexander Begg, History of the North-West (Toronto, 1894), I, p. 348

⁴³Oliver, Canadian North-West, I, p. 504, Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 4 Jun 1862.

control in that area. He immediately set out to become familiar with Red River and its people, and achieved an early popularity.⁴⁴ But when soon after his arrival he became convinced that the Company's bank notes were benefiting the free traders and issued an order to discontinue paying cash for the local farmers' produce, his popularity dwindled rapidly.⁴⁵ The Company was the principle purchaser of this produce, and, as Alexander Begg said: ". . . had it not been for the Hudson's Bay Company, farmers would have been at a loss how to dispose of their produce . . ."⁴⁶ With the farmers thus at their mercy, the Company could pay them any way they liked. When this policy was extended to hunters' provisions, also, the Métis sent a deputation to Mactavish to represent the great hardship it brought upon them. Mactavish said he was sorry for their hardship but that he intended to carry the policy through to drive out the "Yankee traders."⁴⁷ Dallas, explaining the situation to the Governor and Committee, said that in reality there had been no suspension of cash payments, "as supposed by Bishop Anderson."

⁴⁴Begg, History of the North-West, I, p. 348.

⁴⁵Ibid.; Hargrave, Red River, pp. 251-52; Nor'-Wester, Wednesday, 9 Jul 1862.

⁴⁶Alexander Begg, The Creation of Manitoba (Toronto, 1871), p. 8

⁴⁷Nor'-Wester, Thursday, 11 Sep 1862.

He went on to say:

The restriction is confined to Notes, redeemable by Bill on London, which the Company cannot grant beyond the requirements of their mercantile operations. These Bills, being at a high premium in the United States [?], generally find their way into the hands of American Traders, who principally benefit by them.⁴⁸

But Dallas did not say what the farmers were being paid with, nor did he mention the fact that the notes were the principal means of payment in the Settlement. And the Nor'-Wester, apparently, would have quarreled with his high estimation of the premium the Company's notes brought in the United States.

By mid-1863, after undergoing several civil crises, Dallas was thoroughly fed up with the community. Writing to the Company in August of that year, he complained that "I have had great difficulty in persuading the magistrates to act."⁴⁹ Furthermore:

Mr. William Mactavish, Governor of Assiniboin [sic] has resigned his post, and I have only been restrained from following his example, for a short time, in the hope that a remedy would speedily be applied, and that I should be relieved from the unfair position in which I find myself placed, with all the responsibility, and the semblance of authority over a vast territory, but unsupported, if not ignored, by the Crown.⁵⁰

⁴⁸A.H.B.C., A.12/43.

⁴⁹George Bryce, The Remarkable History of the Hudson's Bay Company (Toronto, 1900), p. 449.

⁵⁰E. W. Watkin, Canada and the United States. Recollections, 1851-1886 (London, about 1887), p. 249, Dallas to Watkin, Montreal, 17 Aug 1863; Mactavish was apparently talked out of resigning.

Perhaps trying to eliminate himself as a possible cause of local discontent, Dallas pointed out that the Settlers did not object to the Company's people, merely to the system of government. He feared the formation of a provisional government, and a movement for annexation to the United States, and suggested that the Company's territorial rights revert to the Crown.⁵¹

By November 1863, "having found by experience that my office was a much more onerous & laborious one than I had anticipated when I first accepted it,"⁵² Dallas was telling the Company he was retiring soon.⁵³ There then ensued a series of letters between Dallas and the Company discussing Dallas' plans. Dallas' knack for not coming right out and saying what was on his mind somewhat confused the correspondence, but it seems that when Dallas first mentioned resigning the Company offered to give him back his seat on the Board of Directors, which Dallas had given up his right to when he accepted the job of Governor of Rupert's Land.⁵⁴ Dallas refused, saying he was unwilling "to accept a responsibility

⁵¹Bryce, Remarkable History, p. 449.

⁵²A.H.B.C., D.8/1, Dallas to Fraser, Montreal, 25 Jun 1864.

⁵³Ibid., Fraser to Dallas, London, 10 May 1864.

⁵⁴Watkin, Canada and the United States, p. 261, Dallas to Watkin, Fort Garry, 16 Oct 1863.

in regard to which I was not sufficiently informed, & . . . I did not intend to reside permanently in London."⁵⁵ Later letters in 1863 and 1864 suggested that Dallas had changed his mind. He was hinting around at either a seat on the Board or another job, possibly Secretary of the Company. There was even a suggestion that he now wanted to stay on as Governor of Rupert's Land. But replies from the Company only reminded him that he had told them he intended to retire, that they were certainly sorry to see him go, and that they wished him well for the future.

And they set about replacing him. On 5 March 1864, the Governor and Committee wrote Dallas that since he had indicated to them his intention of visiting England that summer they had given a commission to Mactavish to act as Acting Governor during his absence.⁵⁶ Dallas objected strenuously, at first on the grounds that there would be two Governors of Rupert's Land at the same time. He also suggested that Mactavish's appointment as Acting Governor would make the other officers jealous.⁵⁷

The Company assured Dallas that there would not be two at the same time, since Mactavish's commission did not go into

⁵⁵Dallas to Fraser, Montreal, 25 Jun 1864, in library of Hudson's Bay House, Winnipeg, courtesy of Mrs. Shirlee Smith.

⁵⁶A.H.B.C., A.6/39, Gov and Comm to Dallas, London, 5 Mar 1864.

⁵⁷A.H.B.C., D.8/1, Fraser to Dallas, London, 10 May 1864.

effect until Dallas had left the continent. And in answer to another point Dallas brought up, they assured him that he was still Governor of Rupert's Land while he was visiting Montreal on the way to England, though they obviously did not see why this concerned him since he had no authority over the Montreal Department. They also pointed out that the other officers could hardly object to Mactavish's appointment since he had held a similar appointment before Dallas' arrival in Red River.⁵⁸

So Dallas took another tack:

I certainly regretted that the Commission was sent to Mr. Mactavish, both for the above reasons, and as I believed & still believe, that though a passive recipient, he will never act upon it. In this however I may be mistaken, but such was & still is my belief, founded upon what he had himself told me, & what I know of his character.⁵⁹

As was often the case, Dallas does not make sense. Mactavish would not have objected to acting as Governor of Rupert's Land; it was his current job of Governor of Assiniboia that he objected to. It was probably Dallas' purposes that were confusing him here. Though he seems extremely reluctant to come right out and say so, he shows every sign of having, sometime between the summer of 1863 and the spring

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹A.H.B.C., D.8/1, Dallas to Fraser, Montreal, 25 Jun 1864.

of 1864, changed his mind about resigning as Governor of Rupert's Land. This would explain his complaining about Mactavish's being sent a commission making him Acting Governor of Rupert's Land, something Dallas could object to only if he considered his departure from the Settlement not permanent but temporary.

Too, this is the best explanation for an organizational change Dallas made in April 1864. Dallas appointed Mactavish head of the entire Northern Department, and was to bring James Clare down from York Factory to take charge of Fort Garry.⁶⁰ Mactavish was to act as a go-between between the Northern Department and Dallas, and was to handle the Northern Department's everyday affairs. Though such a change might suggest that Dallas was easing Mactavish into the duties of Governor of Rupert's Land, such was not the case. Dallas in his letters to the Company said nothing about preparing Mactavish to take over his own responsibilities, only that the move had been made to take some of the load off Mactavish's shoulders and enable him to move around a little. More likely, though, Dallas was making the change because of his inability to handle the everyday business of the Northern Department. Dallas' ability was a general, not a specific, thing; he had no training or experience in operat-

⁶⁰A.H.B.C., A.12/43, Dallas to Fraser, Fort Garry, 24 Apr 1864.

ing the Company's most important department. And it was odd that Dallas would make such a basic organizational change on the eve of his departure if he did not intend, or hope, to return.

But whether he wanted to or not, and he denied in the end that he did,⁶¹ Dallas was not to return. Taking his leave of the Council on 4 May 1864, Dallas said he was quite in the dark as to the future.⁶² He also concealed his contemplated retirement from the other Company officers. He said he did it in an effort to establish a confidence that he said he had never been able to establish.⁶³ He left Red River on 17 May 1864, accompanied as far as Pembina by Mactavish, and went on to Montreal before returning to England.⁶⁴

On his return to London, the Company reconsidered and decided to retain Dallas in England to advise the Company on contemplated changes in the organization and government of the territory, as well as on the relations between the

⁶¹A.H.B.C., D.8/1, Dallas to Fraser, Montreal, 25 Jun 1864.

⁶²Oliver, Canadian North-West, I, pp. 541-43, Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 4 May 1864.

⁶³A.H.B.C., D.8/1, Dallas to Fraser, Montreal, 25 Jun 1864.

⁶⁴Hargrave, Red River, p. 329.

Company and its officers.⁶⁵ This last was peculiar in view of the bad relations existing between Dallas and a large segment of the officers in North America. Dallas remained in that capacity until 1 June 1866, when his official connection with the Company was severed.⁶⁶

There seems to have been little trouble between Mactavish and Dallas. The only hint of something amiss was given by a letter Mactavish addressed to the Governor and Committee in February 1864:

At Mr. Hargrave's request I applied to Governor Dallas for an appointment in the service as Apprentice Clerk for a Mr. Wm. Traill, but the Governor referred me to the Governor & Committee, hence the letter herewith it is my first application & whatever the result may be it will be the last. I do not know the young fellow at all but Hargrave who knows pretty well what is wanted says he will answer well.⁶⁷

Mactavish probably felt that Dallas, rather than he, should have forwarded the request, and in any case Mactavish was probably aware that such a request should have gone to the Company's Secretary, rather than the Governor and Committee. The letter appears on the surface to have been a rather small attempt at discrediting Dallas a little. If so, though, it

⁶⁵A.H.B.C., A.6/39, Gov and Comm to Mactavish and Council of Northern and Southern Depts, London, 27 Apr 1865.

⁶⁶Ibid.; A. G. Dallas File in library of Hudson's Bay House, Winnipeg, courtesy of Mrs. Shirlee Smith.

⁶⁷A.H.B.C., A.11/97, Mactavish to Dep Gov and Comm, Fort Garry, 26 Feb 1864.

stands alone in indicating discord between the two men. When Dallas returned from a trip in August 1863, Mactavish went down to St. Paul to meet and return with him.⁶⁸ And as mentioned earlier, on Dallas' final departure in May 1864 Mactavish accompanied him as far as Pembina.

But Dallas' departure must have brought a sigh of relief, both from the North American fur traders and the London officers. A hard-driving business man and efficiency expert, he had all the virtues and vices of both. He had brought to the fur trade vigor, forcefulness, intelligence, and a new point of view. But at the same time, his knowledge of the trade was limited, which in turn limited the value of many of his attempts at increasing the Trade's efficiency. And in his relentless search for efficiency, Dallas often trampled on the semi-private preserves of North American fur trade officers who were accustomed to near-autonomy. There was nothing self-effacing about A. G. Dallas, and, moving into a vast operation where officers were used to working pretty much on their own responsibility, he brought the kind of centralized leadership that demanded not only to be followed but to be recognized. Furthermore, the London officers could not have been altogether happy with the general tone of his correspondence, which tended to be that of an irascible school

⁶⁸Hargrave, Red River, p. 304.

master lecturing a particularly stupid group of pupils. Though no doubt highly capable, Dallas had been a little too forceful, a little too ambitious, a little too coldly analytical, and, judging by his letters to the Governor and Committee, a little too impressed with his own importance.

But Dallas' arrival in the summer of 1862 had at least brought with it a man to fill the long-vacant position of Recorder of Rupert's Land, the Settlement's chief judge. The Company had not sent out a replacement Recorder on Johnson's departure, because uncertainty as to the Company's immediate future in the North West. The solution adopted in the Settlement was to have John Bunn, the community's leading doctor, act as Recorder in an unofficial capacity, and he did so for three years. On Mactavish's recommendation, the Company paid him one hundred pounds a year for his services.⁶⁹ When Bunn died suddenly of apoplexy in the spring of 1861, Mactavish assumed the duties of Recorder until John Black arrived with Dallas in mid-1862.⁷⁰

Black had apparently been hired on Mactavish's recommendation.⁷¹ He had first come out to Red River from England

⁶⁹A.H.B.C., A.6/36, Fraser to Mactavish, London, 17 Apr 1861.

⁷⁰Hargrave, Red River, pp. 90-91.

⁷¹A.H.B.C., A.6/37, Fraser to Mactavish, 17 Apr 1862.

in the autumn of 1839 as a clerk for the Company. For the next few years he among other things acted as clerk for the newly-constituted General Court, for which seven years' previous experience in a lawyer's office had qualified him.⁷² He was promoted to Chief Trader in 1848,⁷³ but retired from the Company in 1854. He returned to England, then went to Australia, where he became Minister of Lands for New South Wales.⁷⁴ Shortly after returning once more to England, he was appointed by the Company as Chairman of the General Quarterly Courts of Rupert's Land, a change in title that the Company thought expedient to avoid possible future trouble over the fact that Black in spite of his legal education had never been admitted to the Bar.⁷⁵

Introduced in the Council by Governor Dallas on 4 June 1862, Black thereby began an eight-year career of presiding over the Settlement's courts that brought him little but unqualified praise. His appointment was a fortunate one. He was acquainted with the peculiarities of the people and their habits, and had many personal acquaintances

⁷²Hargrave, Red River, pp. 243-44.

⁷³A.H.B.C., A.6/27, HBC to John Black, London, 31 Mar 1848.

⁷⁴Hargrave, Red River, pp. 243-44.

⁷⁵A.H.B.C., A.6/37, Fraser to Mactavish, 17 Apr 1862.

in the Settlement. He was conciliatory in manner, displaying untiring patience in listening to everything the most illiterate suitor had to say.⁷⁶ MacBeth described him as "a man of commanding intellect, of great forensic ability, and such noble bent of character that he had the utmost confidence of the whole community."⁷⁷ A French writer, de Tremaudan, while castigating Mactavish unmercifully, referred to Black as a "homme d'une très grande intégrité, et en qui la colonie tout entière avait une confiance absolue."⁷⁸

Black's integrity, however, was of an uncompromising Olympian variety that occasionally caused Mactavish trouble in running Red River under the difficult conditions imposed on him. A prime example was a trial in 1866 involving a Canadian agitator and businessman named John Schultz, where Black denied Schultz the use of the courts when Schultz showed disrespect for the Bench.⁷⁹ Black also located himself so far away from the Settlement that Mactavish had

⁷⁶Hargrave, Red River, pp. 243-44.

⁷⁷R. G. MacBeth, The Making of the Canadian West (Toronto, 1905), p. 66.

⁷⁸A. H. de Tremaudan, Histoire de la Nation Métisse (Montreal, about 1935), p. 221: "a man of very great integrity, one in whom the entire colony had absolute confidence"; (translated by author).

⁷⁹For John Schultz, see Chapters V and VI.

difficulty making use of his services.

When Mactavish first heard of Black's appointment, he harbored hopes of shifting the job of Governor of Assiniboia onto Black's shoulders also. Writing to the Company early in 1862, Mactavish said: "I am of the opinion that it would be better that the Offices of Governor & Recorder were held by the same individual it would be less expensive to the Company."⁸⁰ Mactavish never succeeded in convincing the Company it should make Black Governor of Assiniboia, though he did manage to convince the Governor and Committee that Black should be given a commission to act as Governor of Assiniboia in Mactavish's absence.

Not only was Mactavish unable to divest himself of the Governorship of Assiniboia, but, as already pointed out, he was made Acting Governor of Rupert's Land on Dallas' departure in the summer of 1864. In the April 1865 general letter from the Governor and Committee to the North American officers of the fur trade, the Company announced that they were retaining Mactavish as Acting Governor of Rupert's Land, indicating that he would be relieved of the charge of any particular post so that he could concentrate on supervising and inspecting the Northern and Southern Departments. For thus being Acting Governor of Rupert's Land and Governor of

⁸⁰A.H.B.C., A.12/42, Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 19 Jan 1862.

Assiniboia Mactavish was to be paid five hundred pounds a year in addition to his pay as a Chief Factor. They hoped this would prove a satisfactory solution to "what we have found to be a very difficult question."⁸¹

Mactavish had already retired from the charge of the Company's district of Red River (Fort Garry), in the autumn of 1864, and had been succeeded by Chief Factor James Robert Clare, who had been for some years the officer in charge of York Factory.⁸² Clare's arrival presented Mactavish with another opportunity for getting rid of his onerous duties as Governor of Assiniboia, but he failed to take advantage of it. He explained to the Company that he did not make Clare Governor of Assiniboia, not because of a lack of fitness on Clare's part, since:

I am well aware that he has not an equal for ability & vigor among the officers in this Department at least, but the position is often embarrassing [sic] and disagreeable when held by the officer superintending the Fur Trade business. I think however it would be well to send Mr. Clare a Commission as Councillor of Assiniboia as it would be advantageous sometimes for him to attend meetings of Council.⁸³

Though Mactavish's reasons here are good ones, Clare's

⁸¹A.H.B.C., A.6/39, Gov and Com to Mactavish and Council of Northern and Southern Depts, [London], 27 Apr 1865.

⁸²Hargrave, Red River, p. 343.

⁸³A.H.B.C., A.12/44, Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 5 Nov 1864.

fitness might indeed have been a factor. That Clare would not have made an adequate governor was suggested by two conflicts he later had with Mactavish. In the fall of 1865, a battle was fought, through the Company oddly enough, between Mactavish and Clare over the proper way to combat the free traders encroaching on the Company's business in the area. Clare wrote at least two letters to London criticizing past policy, for which Mactavish was responsible, and Mactavish wrote in September 1865 defending it. Though he did not seem upset about it, Mactavish in his letter implied that Clare was not presenting the two positions fairly and was merely trying to climb in the Company's esteem at Mactavish's expense.⁸⁴ Such seems to have been the case. Clare was apparently one of those men in whom integrity is only inspired by fear, and Mactavish in failing through his habit of relaxed administration to inspire in Clare the proper amount of fear led Clare to underestimate Mactavish's weight in the Company and overestimate his chances of advancing himself by undermining his supervisor. Later on, when a packet from London containing Clare's Commission as Councillor of Assiniboia was lost, Clare accused Mactavish of having withheld it and, in spite of Mactavish's assurances otherwise,

⁸⁴Ibid., Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 5 Sep 1865.

wrote to Dallas in London on the matter.⁸⁵ Clare, in short, left the impression that he was over-ambitious, somewhat unscrupulous, and generally lacking in the character, or at least the political skill, required in a Governor of Assiniboia.

No further friction seems to have arisen between the two men, and they seem to have patched up their differences, but their association was to last only a year more. On a trip to England, after having been confined to his hotel room with dysentery since his arrival in London, Clare died suddenly in January 1867.⁸⁶ When Mactavish heard the news, he wrote: "Poor Clare's death has affected me much, as it is so curious to look back on his desire to go to England it looks like fate, it will make it a busy time for me."⁸⁷

The Company left the choosing of a successor to Mactavish, and he replaced him as officer in charge of Fort Garry with Dr. William Cowan, a graduate in medicine of the University of Glasgow.⁸⁸ Described by one observer as a man

⁸⁵Ibid., Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 5 Dec 1865.

⁸⁶A.H.B.C., A.6/41, W. G. Smith to Mactavish, London, 12 Jan 1867.

⁸⁷A.H.B.C., D.9/1, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 27 Feb 1867.

⁸⁸J. H. O'Donnell, Manitoba As I Saw It, (Toronto, 1909), p. 110.

of refined tastes, an excellent conversationalist, and possessed of a quiet wit,⁸⁹ Cowan had first come to the North-West in 1849, hired by the Company to help treat the Pensioners stationed at Fort Garry. About 1856, he went up to Moose Factory as a surgeon.⁹⁰ Promoted to Chief Trader in 1862, he returned to England in 1864, and on coming back to North America was stationed at Norway House.⁹¹ He was brought down by Mactavish to Fort Garry late in 1866 because he needed a doctor at the fort,⁹² and was put in charge of Fort Garry in 1867 on the death of Clare.

Meanwhile, the Hudson's Bay Company had been bought on 1 June 1863 by the International Financial Association for one and a half million pounds. There apparently was a good deal of resentment over the sale by the Company's officers in North America. Not only were they not consulted previously, but they learned of the sale not from the Company but through the newspapers. Furthermore, they thought they had even been deliberately misled. When a rumor had reached North America earlier that such a transaction was in the making,

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Begg's Journal, p. 181n.

⁹¹Begg, Creation of Manitoba, p. 378.

⁹²Ibid., A.H.B.C., D.9/1, Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 16 Jun 1866.

the Company's officers had made anxious inquiries, but had been assured by the officers in the London office that the rumors were unfounded. What may have happened was that the negotiations for the sale had been conducted in such secrecy and confined to such a high level that many officials in the London office did not know of them.⁹³

In any case, the Company's North American officers were not happy. Since they were paid from shares in the fur trade, they considered themselves, justifiably or not, partners in the Company in a sense, and to have the Company pass out of the hands of the old fur-trading hands and into those of an impersonal financial group, without even a word of farewell from the old leaders, left the fur trade officers considerably dissatisfied.

Dissatisfaction was heightened by the new owners' at first toying with the idea of cancelling the old Deed Poll arrangements that paid the fur trade officers on a share basis, and putting the officers on salary. Since the object obviously was to reduce costs, and at the expense of the Company's officers in North America, the proposition met with considerable opposition. Faced with what Douglas MacKay termed "the disastrous prospect of a general resignation," the Company

⁹³Joseph Pope, The Day of Sir John MacDonald (Toronto, 1915), pp. 451-52.

changed its mind.⁹⁴

The fur trade officers chose Mactavish to represent their interests to the Company, and a trip Mactavish made to Canada during the winter of 1846-65 was extended to include England possibly so he could discuss with the Company the manner of paying the North American fur trade officers.⁹⁵ Another trip was made to England, this time certainly to discuss pay, early in 1866. Mactavish left Red River in March and arrived back in June.⁹⁶ Right before leaving he wrote to Fraser, the Company's Secretary, that:

. . . I never had much liking to being pushed to the front in the dispute between the Officers in the Country & the Shareholders but when I begged some of my friends here not to name me as their Agent, they very plainly told me that I must either give them notice I would not act or they would appoint me. I could not do this so

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 452; MacKay, The Honourable Company, p. 280; no move was made to cancel the Deed Poll until 1871, after the transfer to Canada, when the Company bought out the North American officers with 170,055 pounds: Bryce, Hudson's Bay Company, p. 453.

⁹⁵Beckles Willson, The Life of Lord Strathcona (London, 1915), p. 133; Donald Gunn and C. R. Tuttle, History of Manitoba (Ottawa, 1880), p. 318; see also Willson, Lord Strathcona, p. 133, for letter from Mactavish to officers of Northern Dept, 10 Oct 1864; P.A.M., Samuel Taylor Journal, p. 21, Jun 1865; Hargrave, Red River, p. 355.

⁹⁶A.H.B.C., D.9/1, Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 26 Feb 1866; Ibid., Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 13 Jun 1866.

I am in for it & being in I will do the best I can as far as I see it right.⁹⁷

But Company affairs were almost the least of Mactavish's problems. His job as Governor of Assiniboia more and more pressed in upon him, and the most immediate problem in that area was the Settlement's lack of a sufficient armed force. If there was any widespread dissatisfaction in the Settlement toward the Government of Assiniboia during the 1860's, it was with the lack of protection the Government was providing against the Indians. Always lurking in the backs of the Settlers' minds was the specter of Indian attack, and officially all that stood between them and massacre was a varying force of between three and twelve constables.⁹⁸ Throughout the 1860's, Indians periodically roved near the Settlement, and occasionally almost came right into the community. In August 1864, a large party of Sioux approached the Settlement, and Mactavish and Dallas went out to meet them in an attempt to keep them from coming into Red River. They were successful to the extent that only a small party including the chiefs came into town, the rest camping a short distance off. Later,

⁹⁷A.H.B.C., A.12/44, Mactavish to Fraser, 29 Feb 1866.

⁹⁸P.A.M., Minutes of the Council of Assiniboia, 9 Jan 1862; A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letter, Mactavish to Joseph Howe, Fort Garry, 14 May 1870.

they moved back up the Assiniboine to Portage la Prairie.⁹⁹

In August 1866, Mactavish wrote to the Company:

Ever since the Indian outbreak in Minnesota in 1862, parties of Sioux have visited this Settlement and until this season peace has been maintained. But during this Summer a small party of them who came here were attacked by some American Saulteaux from Red Lake, who it is said came here for the express purpose. Four of the Sioux were murdered well outside the gates of this Establishment, and the Red Lake Indians returned safely to Pembina on their way to their own Country committing various depredations as they passed through the Upper Settlement. The Indians here so far took part in the affair as to scalp and mutilate the bodies, there being no force here to keep order. There is every probability that the Sioux will yet return in force to avenge the attack made on them. This business shows strongly the necessity for having some kind of force here . . .¹⁰⁰

But no Indian attack on Red River was ever made, partly because of the presence of the Métis, though often they were absent from the Settlement in large numbers. Another factor was that the Hudson's Bay Company exerted a tight control over employee policy toward the Indians that left the Indians much less to complain about than did the looser operations of smaller American fur trade companies to the south. A more compelling reason was that Indian depredations generally were retaliations against the encroachment of the whites on their land, and encroachment was far more prevalent south of the border because of the ever-quicken-

⁹⁹Hargrave, Red River, pp. 339-40.

¹⁰⁰A.H.B.C., D.9/1, Mactavish to Gov and Comm, Fort Garry, 22 Aug 1866.

march of American settlement westward. No such pressure was exerted on the Indians in the north. Except for Red River Settlement and scattered Company posts, few whites lived in western British North America east of the Rocky Mountains, and no mass immigration was taking place. Furthermore, British North America was too good a refuge for American Indians such as the Sioux to throw away with a pointless attack on Red River Settlement that might bring British troops down on them.

But the Red River Settlers were not looking at the situation so objectively. Stimulated by Indian depredations to the south, the Settlement talked spasmodically of raising its own local military force. In March 1863, after a serious Indian outbreak in Minnesota the previous year, a petition bearing 449 signatures, and calling for the raising of a force of volunteers and the purchasing of arms to defend the Settlement with, was presented to the Council. The Council, however, rejected it, saying there was no danger to be expected from the Indians until after May.¹⁰¹ They also hoped that their latest petition to the Imperial Government for troops would bring help.¹⁰² In 1867, Mactavish tried to get up a small

¹⁰¹A.H.B.C., A.12/43, Dallas to Fraser, Fort Garry, 23 Mar 1863.

¹⁰²Oliver, Canadian North-West, I, pp. 516-17, Minutes of the Council of Assiniboia, 11 Mar 1863.

armed force to deter the Indians.¹⁰³ The Company approved, but pointedly avoided the issue of whether they would contribute to its support.¹⁰⁴ The Council thereupon decided the danger from Indians had lessened and the force would therefore not be worth the expense.¹⁰⁵

So nothing came of these and other attempts to raise a local armed force, and the main drawback was expense--neither the Company nor the community wanted to pay for one. Mactavish summed up the problem in a letter to the Company of 22 August 1866. Referring to the activities of the Sioux in the area, he said:

This business shows strongly the necessity for having some kind of force here, and though one to meet such a difficulty might be raised here if the present Government could raise the income to pay them, a volunteer force raised and not kept apart from the people would give little strength to the Government in any internal troubles. For this purpose the force would require to be under Officers who would gradually bring them under discipline and keep them apart from the people in the Settlement. As a commencement a small number of disciplined men unconnected with the Settlement would be required, and their numbers might be gradually increased from the Halfbreeds. The funds to meet the expense would be the greatest difficulty, and if they are to be raised in the Settlement, a change in the government

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 570, Minutes of the Council of Assiniboia, 7 Mar 1867.

¹⁰⁴A.H.B.C., A.6/41, Gov and Comm to Mactavish and Northern and Southern Depts, London, 16 Apr 1867.

¹⁰⁵Oliver, Canadian North-West, I, pp. 574-76; Minutes of the Council of Assiniboia, 12 Apr 1867.

here would be required. It would be a not very agreeable experiment, I suspect, but representation in some way would require to be given to the people before they would agree to increased taxation. At present any act of the Government is suspected to be taken in the interest of the Company, and agitation has been so long carried on here that nothing will disabuse the minds of the people on this point. This is so well known that interested parties invariably attribute the operation of the law which presses on them to the Company, trusting to the ignorance and prejudice of the people here to prevent the detection of the falsehood.¹⁰⁶

Another reason for the Settlement's failure to raise its own volunteer force was its perennial hope that the British Government would answer with troops their unceasing barrage of petitions for military protection. One of the first recorded official recommendations from a local Governor for troops had come from Governor Andrew Bulger, who on leaving office in 1823 suggested that a company of troops be sent out to the Settlement by the Crown to support the local government and maintain order.¹⁰⁷ No troops came, however, until 1846, when three companies, 347 men, of the 6th Royal Regiment of Foot, commanded by Major J. F. Crofton, were brought out through York Factory and stationed at Fort Garry.¹⁰⁸ Ostensibly there because of the possibility of war with the U. S. over Oregon, the troops' presence in Red River

¹⁰⁶A.H.B.C., D.9/1, Mactavish to Gov and Comm, Fort Garry, 22 Aug 1866.

¹⁰⁷Bryce, Hudson's Bay Company, p. 349.

¹⁰⁸Morton, Manitoba, p. 76.

more probably represented a move by the Imperial Government to meet the Settlement's need for troops but avoid being accused of supporting the Company's government by announcing that they were intended to meet any trouble arising with the United States.

The 6th Regiment left two years later and was replaced by about seventy Chelsea Pensioners, old or disabled soldiers retired from the service.¹⁰⁹ Major W. B. Caldwell, their commander, was also made Governor of Assiniboia. Where the 6th had apparently been highly thought of in the Settlement, the Pensioners, constituting a negligible military force, were not.¹¹⁰

Pensioners made up the only military body in the Settlement until 1857, when the Company was again able to persuade the British Government to send troops, this time by agreeing to pay for their transportation to the Settlement and for their support while there. The troops, a company of the Royal Canadian Rifles, were sent over the objections of their commanding general in Canada¹¹¹ as well as over those of

¹⁰⁹A. C. Garrioch, The Correction Line (Winnipeg, 1923), p. 157.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 158.

¹¹¹Charles N. Bell, "Some Red River Settlement History," Papers of the Manitoba Historical Society, Trans no. 29, 1887, p. 4.

others in Canada who saw the purpose of the troops as being mainly to enable the "self-constituted and illegal" Hudson's Bay Company Government to uphold the Company's monopoly and enforce regulations the troops would have no business enforcing.¹¹² In assigning the troops to Red River, the Imperial Government cautioned the Company to use "great discretion in calling on the military for their assistance, and confining such application to cases of actual disturbance of the peace."¹¹³

From the start, their commander, Major George Seaton, spent a good deal of his time and effort in Red River trying to get home again. He complained incessantly about the support he was getting from the Company, of the miserable transportation the Company had provided and was providing, and declared that he foresaw no need for the troops in either a police or military capacity. The Company, he said, had nothing to fear from any part of the population. The courts were never prevented from executing a judgment. And the nearest United States troops were 130 soldiers at Fort Ripley, four hundred miles away. Besides, he said, his troops were in no condition to fight, anyway. Repeatedly, Seaton was led to the conclusion that his troops, and particularly himself,

¹¹²Ibid., pp. 5, 7.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 7.

should be withdrawn.¹¹⁴

Seaton's complaints about the support and transportation were unreasonable, and his remarks on the Settlement's tranquillity ignored the fact that it was the presence of his troops that were mainly responsible for that tranquillity. Furthermore, he deliberately avoided mentioning Indians. Major Seaton leaves the suspicion that what was mainly on his mind was that he disliked his assignment and wished he were somewhere else. Allowing him a reasonable amount of intelligence, it is the only reasonable explanation for his assessments of the situation.

Seaton got his wish in 1861. The Company wrote Mactavish in April of that year telling him that the troops were being withdrawn in spite of their protests:

Though deeply regretting the decision of Her Majesty's Government in this respect we trust that no serious consequences will ensue, and in preventing such consequences we depend much on the well known spirit of conciliation, combined with firmness, which has always distinguished the Officers of this Company.¹¹⁵

The subject of troops became a cause for turmoil in the Settlement in 1862. On 30 October, the Council once more brought up the matter of petitioning the British Government for troops. Dallas took the position that if a memorial on

¹¹⁴Ibid., pp. 5-6.

¹¹⁵A.H.B.C., A.6/36, Gov and Comm to Mactavish, London, 17 Apr 1861.

the subject were sent to the Crown it should come from the Settlers, not the Company. Dallas pointed out first of all that the troops had been removed against the wishes and earnest remonstrances of the Company, implying that the Company had little influence with the Government in the matter. Furthermore, Dallas said, the Company had its fort to hide behind, while the Settlers had nothing. He went on to say that the British Government would probably expect either the Company or the Settlers to pay for the transportation and support of the troops, and that the Company had no public revenue to meet public expenditure.¹¹⁶ Dallas had stated his policy a trifle more candidly five months earlier in a letter to the Company, where he advised the Company against asking for more troops for Red River, and said in any case the Crown should pay their expenses.¹¹⁷ The Council of Assiniboia, seeing that Dallas and the Company would not petition for troops, decided to draw up itself a petition for troops.¹¹⁸

The Nor'-Wester regarded Dallas' refusal to ask for

¹¹⁶Oliver, Canadian North-West, I, p. 511, Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 30 Oct 1862.

¹¹⁷A.H.B.C., A.12/43, Dallas to Fraser, Fort Garry, 9 Jun 1862.

¹¹⁸Oliver, Canadian North-West, I, p. 513, Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 30 Oct 1862.

troops on behalf of the Company, and his recommendation that the Settlers ask for them instead, as a deliberate attempt by the Company to avoid having to pay for their transportation and support. Claiming that settlers in other parts of the British Empire did not have to pay for Imperial defense, and that a petition from the Settlers would have no effect anyway, the paper insisted that an effective petition would have to come from the Company.¹¹⁹

There ensued a battle of petitions. The Council began circulating a petition among the Settlers asking the Imperial Government for troops. The Nor'-Wester answered with a petition of its own asking for troops and the dissolution of the Hudson's Bay Company's government. J. J. Hargrave claimed the Nor'-Wester got most of the signatures on its petition by representing it to be the Council's petition. The Council petition got 1,183 signatures, mostly from the Métis section of the community, though Hargrave said that among the English-speaking signers were all the leading citizens.¹²⁰ Neither petition, however, brought troops to the Settlement. And future petitions on the subject would be equally fruitless. Though the Settlement, the Council, and

¹¹⁹Nor'-Wester, Tuesday, 4 Nov 1862.

¹²⁰Ibid., Monday, 17 Nov 1862; Hargrave, Red River, pp. 253-55.

the Hudson's Bay Company repeatedly asked the British Government for troops during the 1860's, and though their petitions were augmented regularly by cries for the same from the Nor'-Wester, none were to be forthcoming until mid-1870, and then it would be too late.

Another possible source of protection for Red River from the Indians lay in the United States troops operating just south of the border, and it was a possibility not lost on the Settlers. During the early 1860's they repeatedly urged Dallas to invite the American troops in, a move that Dallas was not prepared to make.¹²¹ But when a Major Hatch, commanding a small force of United States cavalry stationed temporarily at Pembina, sixty-five miles south of the Settlement, asked permission from Dallas to chase Sioux across the border in hot pursuit, Dallas felt it advisable because of local sentiment to grant the permission Hatch asked for.¹²² Before Hatch could take advantage of it, though, he was told by Washington under no circumstances to send his troops across the border, so that source of protection vanished.¹²³

And while no troops came to protect the Settlement from Indians, neither did any come to support the government,

¹²¹A.H.B.C., A.12/43, Dallas to Fraser, Fort Garry, 16 Mar 1864.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Hargrave, Red River, pp. 318, 320.

and as it turned out this was where the real need lay. Mactavish had always realized that without troops the government of Assiniboia could rule only by consent, and the 1860's showed further that that had to be an active rather than a passive consent. Recognizing that its influence rested not on a basis of power but on persuasiveness and good-will, Mactavish was careful throughout the decade to avoid the accusation of politically persecuting enemies of the Company. Writing to the Governor and Committee in 1867, for instance, Mactavish said:

In drawing up the list of individuals whom I proposed to the Governor and Committee as Councillors of Assiniboia, I passed over the names of William Inkster and William Dease for obvious reasons which I need not enter upon. On further consideration however I have to beg that their names may be added to my list, as their being passed over might be attributed to their being opponents in Trade to the Company, which it is always prudent to avoid. Both are intelligent and have some influence and their admission to the Council cannot do any harm.¹²⁴

But such concessions were not enough to inspire active support for the Company's government, and Mactavish considered a change in the government imperative:

I still think some decided action should be taken at once towards establishing some sort of Government here which might satisfy the people and, in any case would command their obedience to the laws. Circumstances here have so much changed of late from what was contemplated when the Company assumed the Government of the Country that it

¹²⁴A.H.B.C., D. 9/1, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 29 Apr 1867.

would be manifestly unjust to call on the Company to keep order in the Country: but be that as it may, unless the Company's Government is to be entirely supported by force I do not think it now can maintain order, and I would therefore strongly urge the absolute necessity, in the interest of all parties, that the authorities here should derive their powers from some source independent of the Company and that no Company's officer should be mixed up with the Government.¹²⁵

Too, Mactavish recognized within the Settlement generally a latent desire for representative government. In 1867, he wrote: "There is . . . a pretty general feeling here that there should be some change made in the Government . . ."¹²⁶ A year later, he spoke of the strong desire of the population for a government they had a voice in.¹²⁷

One proponent of representative government in Red River was a local employee of the Hudson's Bay Company, Mactavish's secretary, J. J. Hargrave. Writing in 1868 or 1869, Hargrave said:

Possibly a plan better calculated to elicit the true sentiments of the people than that of an opposition newspaper . . . would have been the establishment of a representative chamber with regular session and public debates. The members of such a body would probably have been nearly the same persons as those to whom the Company has given seats in the Council of Assiniboia; but, as the direct representatives of the people they

¹²⁵A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 20 Jan 1868.

¹²⁶A.H.B.C., D.9/1, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 18 Apr 1867.

¹²⁷A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 18 Feb 1868.

might have authorized the imposition of more than the merely nominal taxes now levied, and an efficient force would have existed to support the judgments of courts and the authority of a Government.¹²⁸

Mactavish, however, was not so sure that representative government was the answer. Pointing out in February 1868 that no government, representative or not, would be fully effective without troops to support it, he said that "popular disorders would be more frequent under a representative government⁷ than even at present."¹²⁹ A year earlier, Mactavish had said: "so long as matters stand as they are I do not expect there will be much improvement, whatever form of Government might be adopted."¹³⁰ A. C. Garrioch echoed Mactavish's pessimism regarding the benefits representative government would bring to the Settlement. He

¹²⁸Hargrave, Red River, pp. 468-69; sometime in 1866, soon after the death of James Hargrave, Mactavish apparently received a letter from Hargrave's son, James Joseph Hargrave, asking for a job with the Company. After getting permission from the Company to hire his nephew, Mactavish wrote young Hargrave telling him he could come to work as an Apprentice Clerk if he liked. Hargrave soon became Mactavish's private secretary, and remained so throughout the remainder of Mactavish's term as Governor of Assiniboia: A.H.B.C., D. 9/1, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 22 Jan 1867; Ibid., Mactavish to J. J. Hargrave, Fort Garry, early in 1867.

¹²⁹A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 18 Feb 1868.

¹³⁰A.H.B.C., D. 9/1, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 18 Apr 1867.

felt that an elective council would have been less representative of the intelligent portion of the electorate and less competent to promote the well-being of the community.¹³¹

J. J. Hargrave felt that representative government would merely prove entirely unsatisfactory to the small but vociferous Canadians in the Settlement who were most noisily demanding representative government: ". . . many think the gratification of their demand would serve only to illustrate the fallacy of their other positions and their own local unpopularity."¹³² The Canadians preferred to find out for themselves, however, and their efforts to do so ultimately turned the 1860's in Red River into a decade of turmoil.

¹³¹Garrioch, Correction Line, p. 118.

¹³²Hargrave, Red River, pp. 468-69.

CHAPTER V

AGITATION

Had Rupert's Land, or at least the Red River Settlement, been transferred to Canada in 1857, the Hudson's Bay Company would have given up the reins of government with the reputation of having managed a primitive colony with great tact and wisdom. In that year the decision of the Select Committee of the House of Commons made it certain that the rule of the Company must soon come to an end. This in itself must bring a decline in the authority of the Governor and Council of Assiniboia During the long thirteen years which elapsed before the end came, the loyalty of the settlers to their own Government was sapped; the grip of the Company on its colony was relaxed; and parties rose, openly disloyal to the system. The result was increasing chaos¹

But it was chaos that came early. And it was rooted in economics. The cost of maintaining a force large enough to impose order on the Settlement in times of civil strife was far too high for the Settlement itself to pay, and altogether high enough to deter the Company from assuming it. The Company, therefore, mortgaged its governmental effectiveness to the acquiescence and good will of the local inhabitants. The result was the inherent weakness of the government of Assiniboia that was to remain its salient feature for Red River Settlement's almost sixty years of existence under the Company.

And it was a weakness that could only lead to trouble.

¹A. S. Morton, A History of the Canadian West (Toronto, 1939), pp. 852-53.

The Company's government, like any government, could not please everyone. It could pacify the majority, but in doing so would come far from winning its active support; it won merely its forbearance, which left any minority wanting to cause trouble free rein to do so. Consequently, the Company's government spent until 1849 pacifying the major group in the Settlement, the Métis, and thereafter trying to ride out the various tempests worked up by unfettered minority groups. Throughout it kept from falling or being knocked down by voluntarily lying down.

This weakness was clearly demonstrated by the Métis in the Settlement's earlier years. As early as 1835, Donald Ross was writing to James Hargrave that:

The Settlement was rather in a disturbed state--various commotions having arisen in the course of winter chiefly among the Half breeds--some of these, at times assumed a very alarming appearance, but all passed over so far without any active violence being committed--men's minds are nevertheless in a very unsettled state--and unless some speedy measures are adopted for introducing a few Government Troops into Red River--my firm belief is that both the Settlement and the Fur Trade will fall to pieces on our hands within a very brief term of years--and perhaps get our throats cut to the bargain--these are dreary anticipations, but I can safely assure you that they have not been adopted either hastily or on light grounds, by me, having for years back given the subject, deep and attentive consideration.²

The Métis, an excitable group, continued to roil up now and then. When Thomas Simpson, a relative of George

²Glazebrook, Hargrave Correspondence, pp. 188-89.

Simpson and an employee of the Company at Fort Garry, one day insulted a Métis named Larocoque then smashed him over the head with a poker, laying his head open, a body of Métis descended on the fort and demanded that Simpson be turned over to them or they would demolish the fort. They were eventually pacified.³ When this same Thomas Simpson was later killed on a trip over the plains while in the company of several Métis, the Métis went free.⁴ Perhaps they should have; no evidence of their guilt came to light and their stories appear fairly plausible. But those convinced that the Métis killed Simpson in cold blood said the Company left them unpunished because of its fear of Métis reaction in the Settlement.⁵

The main source of trouble, however, between the Hudson's Bay Company and the Métis and other Red River Settlers until 1849 stemmed from the Company's efforts to maintain its fur trade monopoly. As the population grew in the Settlement, Settlers and incoming traders took more and more to circumventing the monopoly, and the Company clashed repeatedly and increasingly with Métis and others in the Settlement anxious to supplement their incomes by dealing in furs and trading with the Indians. In 1840, the Company's

³Garrioch, Correction Line, p. 144.

⁴Letters of Letitia Hargrave, pp. xlv-xlvi..

⁵Ibid.

officers at Fort Garry, armed with muskets and bayonets, broke open a half-breed cabin and confiscated all the furs it contained.⁶ In 1844, Governor Alexander Christie, prompted by Recorder Adam Thom, ordered all letters sent by local traders to their importers in England to be sent to Fort Garry unsealed for inspection by the Company's officers.⁷ Exempted from this were those willing to sign a declaration that they were not engaging in the fur trade.⁸ The Company also imposed a duty of twenty per cent on all imports, but again exempted those free of the charge of dealing in furs.⁹ Later, the Company produced a new land deed that had to be signed by anyone in the Settlement wishing to hold land. It provided, among other things, that if the land-holder invaded the privileges of the Company or carried on a trade in skins, furs, peltry, or dressed leather, he would forfeit his land.¹⁰ These regulations were withdrawn as soon as the Company's Governor and Committee learned of them but they nevertheless stirred up much resentment in the Settlement.

⁶Stanley, Birth of Western Canada, pp. 44-45.

⁷Begg, History of the North-West, I, p. 257; G. F. G. Stanley, Louis Riel (Toronto, 1963), p. 12.

⁸Stanley, Birth of Western Canada, pp. 44-45.

⁹Bryce, Hudson's Bay Company, p. 436.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 436-37.

The harder the Company worked to put down the free traders, the less successful it was. In 1847, the Métis submitted to the Imperial Government a petition signed with 977 names demanding free trade.¹¹ And in 1849 these same Métis brought the government's monopoly down altogether. Even before the Sayer trial in that year, leading free traders in Red River such as Andrew McDermot and James Sinclair had repeatedly voiced their defiance of the Company monopoly. The matter was brought to a boil by the 1849 arrest of Guillaume Sayer, a Métis, for trading in furs with the Indians. In a trial held on 17 May 1849 influenced possibly by a mob of armed Métis milling around the courthouse threatening to free Sayer and assassinate Adam Thom, the judge, Sayer was either found guilty by a jury or acquitted on what amounted to a technicality, depending on the version accepted.¹² In any case, he was released without punishment. The Métis mob, led by Louis Riel, Sr., then surged off down the road chanting "Trade is free. Trade is free."

Troops in the Settlement at the time of the trial consisted only of a small force of Chelsea Pensioners sent to

¹¹Ibid., pp. 438, 440.

¹²Oliver, Canadian North-West, I, p. 352, Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 10 Oct 1848; Nor'-Wester, Saturday 31 Aug 1861; Stanley, Birth of Western Canada, p. 47; Garrioch, Correction Line, p. 151.

replace the regular troops removed in 1848. The Governor of Assiniboia and Commander of the troops, Major W. B. Caldwell, "dared not set them against the formidable warriors of the buffalo hunt."¹³

The Métis hailed the result of the trial as a virtual victory for their cause, as in fact it was. The tacit concession of free trade in furs restored the Settlement's customary tranquillity, and the next eight years were marred only by occasional petitions such as that sent in 1854 signed by 575 Settlers demanding representative government.¹⁴ This one was sent to the Canadian Government because, according to the petitioners, they could get no satisfaction from the Imperial Government.

Hardly had commercial agitation quieted down, however, than political agitation took its place. As seen above, political agitation had been present before 1849, but almost entirely as a means of gaining an economic end. But by the late 1850's, there had appeared a purely political type of agitation, to some extent favoring the erection of the Settlement into a Crown Colony but mainly favoring its annexation to Canada.

The Crown Colony movement made little headway, despite

¹³Morton, Manitoba, p. 77.

¹⁴Bryce, Hudson's Bay Company, p. 442.

the fact that its aims would probably have most closely met the needs and desires of the Settlers generally. In 1859, Mactavish reported that the English clergy led by Bishop David Anderson had for some time past been trying to get signatures for a petition to the British Parliament to raise Red River Settlement to crown colony status.¹⁵ Their success was limited, and they were energetically opposed by the Canadian Party.¹⁶ Sir George Simpson was unperturbed:

I was not sorry to hear of the counter movement at the Settlement, headed by the Bishop and Clergy, having for its object to obtain the erection of Red River into a Crown Colony independent of Canada. It is to be hoped the agitation on the subject may be kept up as nothing could be more discouraging to the views of the annexation party in Canada.¹⁷

The London office of the Company was equally unimpressed, pointing out that Canada would not like the petition at all and the British Government would not countenance it because of the expense.¹⁸

This somewhat relaxed attitude of the Company held true even for the more violent agitation in favor of annexation to

¹⁵A.H.B.C., A.11/96, Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 26 Feb 1859.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷A.H.B.C., D.4/55, Simpson to Mactavish, Lachine, 22 Mar 1859.

¹⁸A.H.B.C., A.6/34, Fraser to Mactavish, London, 21 Apr 1859.

Canada. Anxious to get out from under the obligation of providing a government for Red River, the Company remarked to Mactavish on one instance: "It may be some comfort to you to reflect that if they bring the administration to a dead lock, the fault will not be ours and that the urgency of some other form of government will be all the more evident."¹⁹

But if Canadian agitation offered some hope to the Company, it brought nothing but trouble to William Mactavish. It started more than a year before he became Governor of Assiniboia. Early in 1857, Captain William Kennedy, a former clerk for the Hudson's Bay Company, showed up in the Settlement and began circulating a petition calling for annexation to Canada and complaining of the Settlement's lack of voice in its government, of the high prices charged for goods, and of the low prices received for their produce.²⁰ Apparently he had success in obtaining signatures for his petition and he left the Settlement for Canada in mid-year.²¹ Johnson, Governor of Assiniboia at the time, thought though that Kennedy's influence would be considerably greater than the

¹⁹A.H.B.C., A.7/4, Sir Edmund Head to Mactavish, London, 16 Apr 1867.

²⁰A.H.B.C., A.11/96, Johnson to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 9 Mar 1857.

²¹Ibid.; A.H.B.C., A.11/96, Johnson to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 29 Jun 1857.

Settlers' response to his petition might indicate: "Amongst the results of his visit which will long, I fear, continue to be felt are the revival of ancient and barbarous animosities, the diffusion of much false information, and the spread of considerable discontent amongst the ignorant and designing."²² Johnson, in fact, suggested to the Company that they try to persuade the Canadian and British Governments to disavow publicly any connection with the agitators in the Settlement.²³ Simpson did not think the Canadian Government would do it for fear of damaging their popularity, but recommended that the British Government be approached in the matter.²⁴ The British Government, hedging, said it could not disavow connection with the Red River agitators because they had received no official notice of the agitation.²⁵ Simpson thereupon told Johnson to send the Company the official notice required, but apparently the matter was dropped soon after.²⁶

Kennedy's activities turned out to be only the forerunner of the serious and continuous agitation for Canadian

²²A.H.B.C., A.11/96, Johnson to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 29 Jun 1857.

²³A.H.B.C., A.12/8, Simpson to W. G. Smith, Lachine, 5 Oct 1867.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵A.H.B.C., A.12/8, Simpson to W. G. Smith, Lachine, 9 Nov 1857.

²⁶Ibid.

annexation of the North-West that came with the founding of the Nor'-Wester newspaper in December 1859. Two Englishmen named William Buckingham and William Coldwell came west to Red River in 1859 to set up a weekly journal. Buckingham was twenty-seven, Coldwell twenty-five.²⁷ Buckingham had worked on the Toronto Globe for two years, and Coldwell had been a shorthand reporter for the Toronto Leader.²⁸ Both brought with them the editorial policy of the Globe, which called for the British Government to cancel the Hudson's Bay Company charter, and to transfer Rupert's Land to Canada.²⁹ The paper rapidly grew to be a rallying point for the "Canadian Party," the Canadian agitators in the Settlement, who were described by Mactavish as "adventurers, with hardly a copper to rub, and no character."³⁰ In addition, the Nor'-Wester fast acquired an influence outside the Settlement greatly exceeding that it exerted within it; and it was an influence, whether inside or outside the colony, that seldom proved beneficial.

The coming of the paper, the first issue of which was

²⁷J. W. Dafoe, "Early Winnipeg Newspapers," Papers of Manitoba Historical Society, Series III, No. 3, 1947, p. 14.

²⁸Morton, History of Canadian West, p. 855.

²⁹Dafoe, "Early Winnipeg Newspapers," p. 14.

³⁰The New Nation, Saturday, 16 Jul 1870.

dated 28 December 1859³¹ did not overly concern Mactavish. He reported to London in November that the paper was about to start operating, but that its advent was not stirring up much excitement, and that most people thought it would be a financial failure.³²

Sir George Simpson was more perturbed. Writing Mactavish, he said:

With reference to the projected newspaper in the settlement, as it is, almost avowedly, intended to be as inimical to the Company as possible, I do not think the gentlemen in the service should support it by becoming subscribers. It will be proper to subscribe as you propose, for two copies, one to be sent to London, and one to me; but beyond that, it would be prudent to decline giving any further encouragement, to an undertaking which I believe will, if it does not die a natural death, do more to disturb the harmony and peace of the Settlement than anything that has yet been attempted in that way.³³

As the newspaper started out to churn its noisy little way through the 1860's, the message it broadcast was one it would continue to blare throughout: the Company was tyrannizing the people of Red River, and the people were eagerly looking for a milder and more generous government (Canada, specifically) to step in and free them from their thralldom.³⁴

³¹Hargrave, Red River, p. 146.

³²A.H.B.C., A.11/96, Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 21 Nov 1859.

³³A.H.B.C., D.4/57, Simpson to Mactavish, Lachine, 18 Jan 1860.

³⁴Begg's Journal, pp. 153-54.

The paper in an early issue stated its editorial policy:

. . . we are bound to say that the feeling in this Settlement is favorable to the Company--regarded merely as a commercial body. The dissatisfaction . . . applies to them in their capacity as a government . . . it is too much to expect that they be a . . . money-making company and an unbiased and impartial government at the same time. The two things are inconsistent.³⁵

In civic matters, the editorial went on, "the Council is passive and helpless--it looks on and cannot or will not interfere. The people have no means of redress. . . . The Red River Council ought to be elective, and its discussions ought to be open to the public." The paper called for "a strong and vigorous government--a government in which the people are heartily interested, and which is free from the suspicion of being biassed and self-interested."

In asking for Council meetings open to the public the Nor'-Wester was asking for something that was never to be granted. Even representatives of the newspaper were not to be admitted to the Council's closed-door sessions. A. A. Taché, the Bishop of St. Boniface and member of the Council of Assiniboia, on 27 February 1860 introduced a motion to authorize the editors of the Nor'-Wester to "assist at the deliberations of the Council of Assiniboia."³⁶ But John Bunn,

³⁵Nor'-Wester, Saturday, 28 Apr 1860.

³⁶Oliver, Canadian North-West, I, pp. 450-51, Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 27 Feb 1860.

another Council member, proposed an amendment to it providing "that it is not expedient to permit any strangers to be present at the deliberations of the Council of Assiniboia." The effect of the amendment would have been to cancel out the original motion. There were four votes for the Bishop's motion, seven for Bunn's amendment, with Mactavish not voting.³⁷ The motion therefore lost and the editors of the Nor'-Wester were thus excluded, an exclusion that would last to the end of the newspaper's ten-year life.

The paper resorted to disgruntled remarks: "It is whispered in well-informed circles that a meeting of the Council of Assiniboia was held on Thursday last. The deliberations were of course secret."³⁸ And: "There was a meeting of our irresponsible legislature . . . but no conclusions were arrived at and they adjourned to yesterday. We know nothing of what has transpired in this closed-doors meeting, and therefore can give nothing to our readers. The meagre account usually furnished us will appear in our next."³⁹ Mactavish said the editors were using their exclusion merely as an excuse to attack the Company.⁴⁰ After three years of

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Nor'-Wester, Monday, 14 May 1860.

³⁹Ibid., Friday, 15 Mar 1861.

⁴⁰A.H.B.C., A.11/96, Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 26 Mar 1860.

satirical treatment by the newspaper, the Council voted on 25 November 1862 to "decline to send any report of their proceedings in future to the 'Nor Wester' for publication, as the report of their last Meeting was so unfairly dealt with."⁴¹

These tactics did nothing to discourage the Nor'-Wester's opposition, and as the years passed it continued its attacks much as it had begun them, employing the common journalistic device of implying that it spoke for a far larger segment of the population than was actually the case:

There is much dissatisfaction with the Council and with the Courts There is a settled conviction, right or wrong, on people's minds, that the Council of Assiniboia is a mere puppet of the Hudson's Bay Company, and that all its legislation is moulded by the material interests of that Company. Some may be unable readily to enumerate instances in which the interests of the settlers have been sacrificed because antagonistic to those of the Company; still they have the conviction.⁴²

And since the courts and the Council, it would go on, were not really separate but almost the same thing, the Council provided the people with no protection where they most needed it--"when their interests clash with those of the Company."⁴³

⁴¹Oliver, Canadian North West, I, p. 515, Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 25 Nov 1862; the Settlement was at this time in the midst of the Corbett crisis, dealt with in Chapter VI.

⁴²Nor'-Wester, Friday, 15 Feb 1861.

⁴³Ibid.

Furthermore, "the whole administration of affairs from first to last, has been weak, vacillating, and intolerable Keep the people of Red River in their present miserable state of political serfdom for two or three years longer, and, our word for it, they will take the reins of government into their own hands."⁴⁴

The Company remained relatively unconcerned. Simpson had been concerned, and he apparently even refused at first to take a copy of the newspaper when one was offered him by the publishers,⁴⁵ but the London office felt differently, writing to Mactavish that:

The Governor and Committee do not wish to give the Editors of that paper ground for saying that they have damaged or thrown obstacles in the way of publication. They consequently instruct me to say that you are authorized to subscribe for ten copies of the Journal on behalf of the Company. Of this number you will please to forward two copies to this house, and to distribute the remaining numbers as you may think fit.⁴⁶

And when Mactavish reported that the newspaper was hostile to the Company,⁴⁷ the London office replied:

It is to be regretted that the Editor should commence his labours by showing hostility to the Company, but as the

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵A.H.B.C., A.11/96, Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 26 Jan 1860.

⁴⁶A.H.B.C., A.6/35, Fraser to Mactavish, London, 28 Mar 1860.

⁴⁷A.H.B.C., A.11/96, Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 26 Mar 1860.

paper was started for Canadian purposes and the articles are written for Canadian readers it is not easy to see how that hostility can be counteracted, as it is the principal Capital of the concern.⁴⁸

Actually Mactavish and the Company had little to complain about in these early years. Though decidedly in opposition to the Company's government, the paper maintained a fairly restrained tone and a surprising degree of journalistic integrity. It strictly avoided personal attacks, even going out of its way on occasion to do so. A letter the newspaper printed in December 1862 criticized the administration of the Hudson's Bay Company government in the past, but went on to say that the writer did "not mean to attribute this state of the country to the ill-management of our former Governor Mactavish."⁴⁹ Mactavish and some of the other Company governors, the writer said, deserve "much credit, considering that they were under the control of a selfish Fur Trading Company."⁵⁰ An editor's note following the letter said: "We are happy to notice that Mr. Garrick excepts Mr. Mactavish from the list of bad governors. He is right." And the Nor'-Wester, while demanding representative government, even on occasion offered intelligent suggestions for

⁴⁸ A.H.B.C., A.6/35, Fraser to Mactavish, London, 9 May 1860.

⁴⁹ Mactavish had just offered his resignation.

⁵⁰ Nor'-Wester, Wednesday, 24 Dec 1862.

bringing it to the Settlement while at the same time resolving the Company's fears of an elective Council.⁵¹ In fact, during the Nor'-Wester's first eight years of life, it was a remarkably good newspaper for a small, isolated, unsophisticated settlement such as Red River was. Reporting and writing were good, and it quite possibly served a definite public interest. It was occasionally wrong, but never deliberately unfair, and though some of its content was directed at its Canadian readers, most was aimed at the community itself.

But the paper began changing hands early. Buckingham left the concern in its first year⁵² and James Ross, educated partly in Red River but "not from the classrooms of the University of Toronto," took over Buckingham's half of the paper.⁵³ Ross sold out to John Schultz early in 1864,⁵⁴ and a year later, Schultz bought the other half-interest in the paper from Coldwell, making him sole owner.⁵⁵ None of these changes brought a noticeable change in the newspaper's attitude or tone, though Schultz did instill a more international

⁵¹Nor'-Wester, Saturday, 20 June 1863.

⁵²Hargrave, Red River, p. 146.

⁵³Morton, History of Canadian West, p. 855.

⁵⁴Nor'-Wester, Thursday, 3 Mar 1864; Hargrave, Red River, p. 146.

⁵⁵Ibid., Tuesday, 4 Jul. 1865.

and literary flavor to the production. Editorials on such things as the United States Presidential election of 1864 made their appearance, as well as spurts of poetry and essays on flowers, seasons, and other subjects susceptible to emotional treatment.

But on 31 July 1868, Schultz turned the paper over to Walter Bown, a Canadian and local dentist of sorts,⁵⁶ and with Bown came the tone the newspaper is so often criticized for. It became stupid, childish, vindictive, unfair, unreliable--in short nothing but a propaganda sheet. Lacking intelligence, Bown gave the community invective; lacking talent, he supplied purple prose; lacking wit, he resorted to such substitutes as misspelling Mactavish's name. He alternated, sometimes in the same article, between referring to the Company as a "broken down, superannuated shabby-genteel old lady" and as "grinding her subjects with the iron pressure of irresistible power, and again sitting impotent in the presence of mob law excited by the action of a newspaper, in dread of being crushed under the smallest interference."⁵⁷

A fair sample of Bown's literary power is found in the 22 January 1869 issue, where Bown referred to "The Humbug Bay Company . . . the rotten fabric that Prince Rupert built,"

⁵⁶Morton, History of Canadian West, p. 855.

⁵⁷Hargrave, Red River, p. 444.

and warned the buffalo hunters that they "must give way before a superior intelligence." This last was typical of the line the paper took toward the Red River Métis. With statements such as it expected twenty-five thousand immigrants the first year alone, the paper played on Métis fears of being dispossessed and overwhelmed by English Protestants from Ontario.⁵⁸ At one time, a large crowd of Métis, incensed at the Nor'-Wester's refusal to print a petition they had gotten up to counter a Nor'-Wester petition, headed for the newspaper's office vowing to remove the printing press and lock it up in the jail, thus halting publication altogether. Mactavish, though unsupported by physical force, succeeded through his personal influence in pacifying the crowd and the newspaper was left intact.⁵⁹

The paper under Bown was extreme in every aspect of "reporting." On learning of the Company's having accepted Canada's offer of 300,000 pounds for its rights in the North-West, Bown reacted in a manner that could only be described as ecstatic.⁶⁰ In the very next issue, on learning that a Wemyss Simpson, Member of Parliament from Algoma District in Ontario

⁵⁸Nor'-Wester, 24 Aug 1869.

⁵⁹Hargrave, Red River, p. 435.

⁶⁰Nor'-Wester, 24 Apr 1869.

(and relative of Sir George Simpson), had recommended in Parliament that the present Company officers in the Red River government be retained temporarily after the transfer of territory, he went wild with rage.⁶¹ Bown gave the community personal journalism with a vengeance. The only issue approaching good journalism that appeared under him was the one that came out soon after the Métis set up their road block in October 1869. On that occasion Bown assumed a tone of such sweet, though slightly frightened, reasonableness that he hardly seemed like the same editor. He even went so far as to spell Mactavish's name right for the first time in more than a year. He recovered soon after, however; the former stridency returned, and held through the newspaper's last issue, that of 24 November 1869.

Soon after his newspaper was suppressed by Riel, Bown left Winnipeg in disguise, turned up next at Lower Fort Garry, then went on from there farther into the interior where he spent the rest of the uprising at a Hudson's Bay Company post called "Eagle's Nest," "living most of the time at the expense of the very parties he had so long abused in his newspaper."⁶² Apparently it was the last the Settlement saw of Bown and his journalism.

⁶¹Ibid., 8 May 1869.

⁶²Alexander Begg, The Creation of Manitoba (Toronto, 1871), p. 171.

Early in the decade, Anglican Bishop Anderson pointed out correctly enough that what the Settlement had was a one-sided press. He said that what was needed was another paper, raising a voice on the side of order, authority, truth, social progress, and "right-minded patriotism."⁶³ Alexander McArthur would have agreed with him. Mactavish, he said, "looked with contempt upon the miserable little sheet which issued from the press at Fort Garry with so much irregularity. He might have bought it off, or he might have started a rival had he estimated its influence at the proper value."⁶⁴ Mactavish did correctly assess the Nor-Wester's persuasiveness in the Settlement: ". . . the people here take little interest," in it.⁶⁵ Begg and Nursey said much the same: ". . . the people of the settlement took very little interest in the literary efforts of the village editor."⁶⁶ But Mactavish underestimated the degree to which the newspaper could arouse hostility against it, and, since it had become identified with Canada, hostility against Canada. Too, he underestimated its influence outside the Settlement. Quoted

⁶³Hargrave, Red River, p. 468.

⁶⁴McArthur, "The Causes of the Rising," p. 4.

⁶⁵A.H.B.C., A.11/96, Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 26 Mar 1860.

⁶⁶Begg and Nursey, Ten Years in Winnipeg, p. 6.

widely by such Canadian dailies as the Toronto Globe though speaking for less than one per cent of the Settlement's population, the Nor'-Wester attained a comparatively enormous influence. Its continual haranguing against the Hudson's Bay Company government, and the impression it gave of speaking for a large part of the Settlement, fostered misunderstanding and needless animosity in Canada toward the Company, and bolstered the Canadian Government in its decade-long effort to deny the Company any rights under its charter and thereby pave the way for Canada's acquiring the North-West without having to buy the Company out. The Nor'-Wester version of life in the North-West became very convenient for the Canadian Government to accept at face value, and it would not be the first government to accept interpretations of events not because they were logical or of proven accuracy but because it wanted to believe them. The Nor'-Wester, in fact, might explain several Canadian Government actions taken later.

But that Mactavish did not pay the newspaper the attention it deserved is not surprising. He considered the Nor'-Wester as having little influence in the Settlement, too little to require opposition. And he was too aware of the inaccuracy of the picture the Nor'-Wester painted of the community to suspect the hefty influence it could wield in the Red River news vacuum existing in Canada; or, for that matter,

how that influence could affect Red River. Too, he did not suspect what the ultimate effect would be of the newspaper's policy of personal attack on the Métis part of the community. Furthermore, Mactavish probably looked upon a newspaper as a business proposition, not a weapon. He did not think the Nor'-Wester at its inception would be a financial success, and certainly would not have considered a second newspaper in the community an intelligent commercial risk. Sitting above all this is the fact that both Mactavish and the Hudson's Bay Company were far more inclined in matters of this kind to hold themselves aloof rather than descend to the cock-pit of local politics. And so the Nor'-Wester, partly because of indifference and miscalculation on the part of Mactavish, partly because of, according to J. J. Hargrave, a prevailing feeling that the paper, in spite of its political action, was an experiment that should succeed,⁶⁷ continued its deceptive way unmolested and unopposed, representing few but pretending to speak for many, and in the process arousing a bitter hostility among the Métis. And in doing the latter it was directly responsible not only for much of the turmoil in the Settlement during the 1860's but for the Métis rebellion that ended its life.

⁶⁷Hargrave, Red River, p. 468.

CHAPTER VI

DEFIANCE

But the Nor'-Wester's din occasionally faded to mere background noise to the law-defying antics of some of the more active agitators in the Settlement. One of the earliest of these to clash directly and personally with the government of Assiniboia was James Ross, for a time part-owner of the Nor'-Wester. Ross had plowed a rather wavering furrow after returning to Red River from the east around 1859. At first he flirted with the local government, becoming postmaster in 1859.¹ In June 1861 he was appointed by the Council by a vote of ten to one for the positions of Governor of the Jail and Sheriff of Assiniboia.² Following the death of John Bunn, Mactavish wrote the Governor and Committee recommending that Ross also be appointed to fill the Councillor of Assiniboia and Justice of the Peace positions vacated by Bunn. Mactavish indicated that he was not entirely happy with his choice of Ross in those two positions, fearing that some Councillors might object to Ross so much that they would not act with him, but he explained that Ross was the only man

¹Oliver, Canadian North-West, I, pp. 505-508, Ross to Mactavish, 17 May 1861.

²Ibid., pp. 478-79, Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 8 Jun 1861; Morton, History of Canadian West, p. 858.

in the community qualified to fill Bunn's seat on the Council. And, he pointed out, the position of Justice of the Peace would have to be filled or a Recorder would have to be sent out.³

The Company replied that it did not want to send a Recorder. Recognizing Mactavish's indecision regarding Ross, they left the matter up to him, sending Ross's two commissions for Mactavish to use if he felt like it, and telling him they were "desirous that nothing should be done, excepting through your intervention and with your concurrence and approbation."⁴

Six months later Mactavish was still undecided. Writing to the Governor and Committee in December 1861, he said:

I am still of the same opinion in the matter as when I wrote you on the 3rd of June last viz that for want of a better person it would be expedient to name Mr. Ross for both the above appointments but at present Mr. Ross is so unpopular in the Settlement that I have not ventured to make the appointment as his services would be of no assistance to me. I will therefore for the present ~~blotted out~~ retain the Letter & Commissions for him but will use them as soon as I can as I feel much the want of such assistance as I think Mr. Ross might give me in those positions and I have no doubt that when he comes to act, his practice will differ from his theory.⁵

³A.H.B.C., A.6/36, Fraser to Mactavish, London, 3 Sep 1861.

⁴Ibid., A.H.B.C., B.235/c/1, Gov and Comm to Ross, London, 2 Sep 1861 (enclosed in above letter to Mactavish).

⁵A.H.B.C., A.12/42, Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 3 Dec 1861.

Mactavish never got around to appointing Ross as Councillor and Justice of the Peace, and a year later was asking the Council to fire him as Postmaster and Sheriff and Governor of the Jail. At the Council meeting of 25 November 1862, Mactavish, incensed at the Nor'-Wester's circulating a petition for troops counter to its own petition, moved that:

Sheriff Ross in stirring up the people as he has lately been doing to opposition to the Council and in endeavouring to thwart the Council in the measures they had thought proper to take for the public peace, and common safety, by calling upon the public to look upon their acts with suspicion, and representing to the Home Government that there was no Justice to be obtained between man and man in this Settlement

had disqualified himself as an officer of the Government. Mactavish moved that Ross be removed from all public offices. The motion was seconded by Bishop Taché and carried unanimously.⁶

On the heels of Ross's dismissal came the first major civil crisis faced by the Company in the 1860's--the Corbett affair. The Reverend Griffith Owen Corbett, an Anglican missionary, was an agitator of surprising energy, tenacity, and flexibility. In 1857 he had gone to England to testify before the Select Committee against the Hudson's Bay Company. Soon after returning to the Settlement he embroiled himself

⁶Oliver, Canadian North-West, I, p. 514, Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 25 Nov 1862.

in the agitation for Crown Colony status for the Settlement.⁷ Commenting on him, Mactavish said "his hostility is however nearly as harmless as his friendship is undesirable."⁸

In mid-1861, Corbett began writing letters to the Nor'-Wester complaining about the increased representation Catholics were getting on the Council of Assiniboia. Originally, he said in his first letter, there was only one Catholic on the Council; now there were seven. They were matched by seven Protestants, he admitted, but the fifteenth man on the Council, Mactavish, was "Catholic-directed," giving the Catholics an edge.⁹ A reply to Corbett's letter was printed in the same issue. Evidently written by a Protestant, it stated that Corbett's accusation against Mactavish was unsupported by any of Mactavish's public acts: "Whatever the Governor's private convictions may be--and we should be very sorry to intrude upon them--his career here has in no way belied his profession as a Protestant."

Two issues later, Corbett was back with another letter continuing his complaints of Mactavish's Catholic tendencies and complaining further that Mactavish had illegally bestowed

⁷A.H.B.C., A.11/96, Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 26 Feb 1859.

⁸Ibid., Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 9 Feb 1858.

⁹Nor'-Wester, Saturday, 15 Jun 1861; the population of the Settlement at this time was more than half Catholic.

the title "Lord" on the Catholic Bishop in various "state papers," placing the Bishop on an equal footing with the Anglican Lord Bishop of Rupert's Land. He proved the "illegality" of this act through a lengthy dissertation on Imperial law.¹⁰ It turned out later that the "state papers" were the minutes of the Council of Assiniboia, and that a clerk had in some of them affixed the title "Lord" to the name of the Bishop of St. Boniface to match that in the title of the Anglican Bishop.¹¹ Corbett's letters were described by a local Catholic as "silly trash of a notorious pettifogger."¹²

Additional light was shed on Corbett's character by the death of a little girl in Headingly in 1861. Local custom was to bury the dead within two days of death, and the little girl's parents asked Corbett to officiate at the funeral services two days after she died. Corbett replied by letter that the funeral would have to wait since he had a dinner engagement on that day. But the weather was cool, he added, and the corpse would keep till he returned. His mind was changed by the threat of a report to his bishop.¹³

¹⁰Nor'-Wester, Monday, 15 Jul 1861.

¹¹Hargrave, Red River, pp. 202-203.

¹²Nor'-Wester, Thursday, 15 Aug 1861.

¹³Hargrave, Red River, pp. 206-207.

Late in 1862, while agitating for a Nor'-Wester petition denouncing the Company's government, Corbett was arrested for attempted abortion.¹⁴ Complications set in when Corbett was arraigned and bound over for trial. Corbett said he had been refused bail. James Sinclair, the presiding magistrate, said neither Corbett nor his friends had asked for bail. There followed several days during which Corbett's friends tried to arrange bail for Corbett and got what looked suspiciously like a "run-around" from the Company's officials. The battle for Corbett's bail opened with a mob of Corbett supporters surging into Fort Garry and milling around the nearby jail. Spying Mactavish walking across the yard of the fort, they approached him on the subject. Mactavish held aloof, telling them he had no authority in the matter and that they would have to see Dallas.¹⁵ Dallas was away from the Settlement at the time. The mob eventually dispersed, and Dallas was contacted. He said he had no authority in the matter either, that it was up to the judicial department. Corbett's friends then went back to Sinclair. He told them it was out of his hands and

¹⁴Morton, History of Canadian West, p. 859; for most accurate and detailed account of the Corbett affair in its entirety, see Nor'-Wester issues from December 1862 to June 1863.

¹⁵Nor'-Wester, Friday, 12 Dec 1862.

they would have to see Black. Black told them they would have to apply to Sinclair, through Corbett. Back and forth and 'round and 'round went Corbett's friends in their efforts to bail Corbett out of jail. Having apparently run out of stalling tactics, the local magistrates finally granted bail on 15 or 16 December.

The trial came up in February 1863. Corbett was accused of having tried over the space of several months to procure the abortion of a servant girl working for him who had become pregnant through his efforts. As the details came out at the trial, Corbett took shape as an abortionist as imaginative as he was unsuccessful. Though he condemned his accusers as "confounded liars,"¹⁶ he was convicted without much difficulty and given six months in jail without forfeiture of goods, without hard labor, and without solitary confinement.¹⁷ The trial was judged to have been a fair one, and the sentence was eminently mild.

But not mild enough, apparently. The Corbett affair all along had been magnified out of all just proportion by a growing suspicion, fertilized by the Nor'-Wester, that the Company was persecuting Corbett because of his history of agitation against the Company. Without this vague but fairly

¹⁶Nor'-Wester, Wednesday, 24 Dec 1862.

¹⁷Nor'-Wester, Saturday, 23 May 1863.

widespread suspicion, Corbett's supporters would have been limited to his fellow agitators, a small group indeed. With it, however, they were able to work up the mob mentioned earlier and, after the trial, obtain 551 signatures on a petition asking for Corbett's release.¹⁸ The petition was given to the Council, which referred it on to Governor Dallas.¹⁹ Dallas denied the request.²⁰ Soon after, on Monday, 20 April, a small group led by James Stewart, a St. James schoolmaster, broke into the jail and released Corbett. Constables were dispatched and Stewart was brought in the next day. On Wednesday, 22 April, another group liberated Stewart.²¹

The crux of the problem was the shortage of an adequate police force, but compounding it was the jail itself. It had been seldom used and confinement in it almost depended on the consent of the prisoner. James Mulligan, for long a local constable, described it as "a small log building just outside the wall of Fort Garry . . . far from being a very secure place of confinement for prisoners."²² Twenty years before, the jail had been inside

¹⁸Nor'-Wester, Monday, 13 Apr 1863.

¹⁹Oliver, Canadian North-West, I, p. 522, Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 9 Apr 1863.

²⁰Nor'-Wester, Monday, 13 Apr 1863.

²¹Nor'-Wester, Monday, 27 Apr 1863.

²²Begg and Nursey, Ten Years in Winnipeg, p. 7.

the fort. "It being found exceedingly dangerous and inconvenient to have the public jail within the walls of Fort Garry,"²³ however, the Company in 1843 decided to abandon that jail and build another outside the walls, taking care, for some reason, to place the new jail within reach of the guns of the fort.²⁴ Neither the guns of the fort nor much else in the way of force was subsequently brought to bear on the problem, however, and no attempt was made to recapture any of the escapees after the second jail break. Cowan testified later that the French offered Dallas a force to restore order to the Settlement and Corbett to jail, but Dallas refused on the grounds that he did not want to start a civil war in the Settlement, setting one part of the people, the French, against the other, the English.²⁵ The Council of Assiniboia, while deploring the jail-breaking, approved of Dallas' course.²⁶ The Council decided the only solution to

²³Oliver, Canadian North-West, I, p. 310, Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 3 Jul 1843.

²⁴Ibid.; p. 311, Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 19 Jun 1844; Charles Napier Bell, "The Old Forts of Winnipeg," Papers of Manitoba Historical Society, New Series, Trans 3, 1927, p. 36.

²⁵Canada: Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Causes of the Difficulties in the North-West Territories in 1869-70 (Ottawa, 1874), Cowan testimony, p. 126.

²⁶Oliver, Canadian North-West, I, p. 526, Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 28 Apr 1863.

the problem was to obtain troops from the British Government, and it sent a request to that effect to the London office of the Hudson's Bay Company near the end of April 1863.²⁷ No troops came.²⁸

The Settlement quieted down after Corbett's and Stewart's release, but Corbett did not. Two years later, word reached the Settlement that he was in London loudly asserting his innocence, claiming that the Company was persecuting him politically, and suing Dallas and the Company before the Court of Common Pleas for 5,000 pounds sterling.²⁹ The wheels of justice ground slowly. Four years later the Settlement learned that Corbett was still suing Dallas and the Company for 5,000 pounds,³⁰ and a year after that, in

²⁷Ibid., pp. 527-28, Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 28 Apr 1863.

²⁸The behavior of the Nor'-Wester during the Corbett crisis might be of interest. It started out by supporting Corbett in his contention that he was being hounded unjustly by the Company because of his political agitation against it. Still, the paper printed letters supporting both sides. It continued to support Corbett until the trial. Then, as the evidence unfolded against Corbett, the paper backed off with almost unseemly haste and remained strictly neutral throughout the rest of the affair. When supporting Corbett, it gave the impression of doing so out of honest conviction, though it was one perhaps too much influenced by its set against the Company's government.

²⁹Nor'-Wester, Tuesday, 8 Jun 1865; Hargrave, Red River, p. 502.

³⁰Hargrave, Red River, p. 463.

the midst of the rebellion, the New Nation stated that Corbett's suit was still pending, but that Corbett was now asking for part of the 300,000 pounds the Company was being paid for its rights in the North-West.³¹

But if Mactavish found Corbett "undesirable," he found a "red-blondé giant, powerful of body and crafty of eye and mind"³² named John Christian Schultz considerably more so. "Grasping by nature and utterly unscrupulous,"³³ Schultz usually belied his actions with a calm, reasonable manner that was eminently charming and convincing to those who knew nothing of him. "'Fate had manufactured a scoundrel out of material meant by Nature for a gentleman."³⁴

A doctor, apparently, Schultz came out to the Settlement in 1860 from Canada and set about supplementing his medical income through various business enterprises. The first recorded contact between Schultz and Mactavish was an amicable one. In 1861 the two men were dual secretaries of the Institute of Rupert's Land, a local scientific society.³⁵ But relations between the two men, if they were

³¹New Nation, Friday, 29 Apr 1870.

³²Morton, Manitoba, p. 110.

³³Morton, History of Canadian West, p. 863.

³⁴Morton, Manitoba, p. 110.

³⁵A.H.B.C., D.9/1, George Dawson, to Mactavish and Schultz, Kingston, Ontario, 31 Mar 1862.

ever pleasant, soon deteriorated as Schultz became the leader of the Canadian Party. In fact, he not only led it but, as W. L. Morton pointed out, was the Canadian Party, along with any other Canadians who happened to be around at the time.³⁶

Still, in the early years, Schultz and the Hudson's Bay Company found it advantageous to do business together. According to an indenture signed by Mactavish as a representative of the Company and Schultz, dated 2 May 1864, the Company loaned Schultz 320 pounds to buy Ross's share of the Nor'-Wester. Collateral for the loan was the half share of the newspaper and general printing business that Schultz was buying, including "the type press and all other printing materials of the office known as the Nor'Wester office."³⁷ On 1 June 1864, the Company loaned Schultz 150 pounds to buy a plot of land, to be paid off in ten equal instalments. The first payment was to be made on 1 June 1865. In addition, Schultz was to pay off the interest on the loan every six months at five per cent per annum. By 11 May 1866, Schultz had paid in 15 pounds but no interest, and by that time had decided he wanted neither the land nor most of the buildings he had built on it in the meantime. So on 11 May 1866 an

³⁶Morton, Manitoba, p. 110.

³⁷A.H.B.C., E.8/8, Indenture between Mactavish and Schultz.

agreement was drawn up cancelling the deal. At the same time, the Company bought from him for 720 pounds all the buildings he had put up on the land except for a small stone outhouse that Schultz had apparently become attached to and intended to carry off with him.³⁸

Schultz's first clash with the Company was an indirect one. He had gone into business with his half-brother and fellow Canadian, Henry McKenney. Later dissolving their partnership, but apparently not to everyone's satisfaction, Schultz and McKenney in May 1866 found themselves opposing one another in a law suit. Schultz began haranguing the Judge, John Black, and the Company for good measure, for not properly prosecuting his case.³⁹ When Schultz said one day in court that Black "had allowed himself to be browbeaten by the defendant,"⁴⁰ Black told him he would either have to withdraw the remark or appoint an agent to act for him in court, since he (Schultz) would not be allowed to plead before him (Black).⁴¹ Schultz refused either to retract his statement or to appoint an agent, so, according to Mactavish, "several causes he had for decision at the Court were refused

³⁸A.H.B.C., E.8/8, Agreement between Company and Schultz.

³⁹Hargrave, Red River, pp. 391-92.

⁴⁰A.H.B.C., D.9/1, Mactavish to Fraser, 21(?) Aug 1866.

⁴¹Ibid., Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 13 Jun 1866.

a hearing."⁴²

Mactavish was away in England at the time. When he returned he immediately took issue with Black. Writing to the Governor and Committee, he said:

There is no question about the propriety of subjecting the offender to some punishment but I think the move taken to punish him unfortunate and that it would have been better either to have committed or confined him for contempt than to have closed the Court to him. He claims already to have sustained loss from the course followed. Of course he will make the most of it indeed has already done so in the Nor'Wester newspaper of which he is Proprietor, and insinuates that it is an attempt on the part of the Hudson's Bay Company to crush an opponent in trade⁴³

Black, however, thought himself justified and thought Schultz had been treated better than he would have been had the Court taken any other course open to it.⁴⁴ The quiet, behind-the-scenes battle between Mactavish and Black went on for nine months, both men continuing to feel strongly that they were right, Black refusing to back down on his decision, and Mactavish doing nothing about it but referring the matter to the Governor and Committee, since he felt "it would be extremely inexpedient that I should directly interfere to alter a decree of the Court."⁴⁵

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵A.H.B.C., D.9/1, Mactavish to Fraser, 21(?) Aug 1866.

Coloring Mactavish's attitude in the matter was his resentment at Black's attempt to avoid excessive involvement in Settlement matters by establishing his residence a considerable distance from the Settlement, possibly at Lower Fort Garry.⁴⁶ As Mactavish put it:

Black for his own convenience has chosen to establish himself out of the way of business & at the same time out of the way of trouble but situated as he is I think he runs the risk of becoming perfectly useless here & losing all influence at the same time on wishing to consult him I must send a note 20 miles.⁴⁷

In any case, Mactavish was prepared to accept Black's decision if the Company found it to be legal:

if he is right I have no wish to reverse it, & troubles arising from it hereafter must be dealt with as they come, but as trouble will certainly arise from it, it is very necessary to be sure of the first step as Blacks decision if wrong will give a bad look to any after fracas however right my action might have been by itself. thus Schultz will certainly resist the payment of duty on his imports if he is prevented from prosecuting his debtors & I am determined to seize his goods if he does not pay duty--if anything should happen from this, the action on either side might be sustained or judged wrong according as the cause of the whole might be considered just or unjust--I would like therefore to get from you a decided opinion as to the justice of the punishment inflicted on Schultz--I have no doubt the course followed will lower the court in public estimation as the quarrel has now assumed the appearance of a wrangle between two schoolboys--I wont give in being the determination on both sides though both I believe would willingly get rid of the affair.⁴⁸

⁴⁶A.H.B.C., A.12/44, Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 22(?) Aug 1866.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid.

The Governor and Committee got the expert opinion of a Mr. Montague Bere on the matter and sent it to Mactavish.⁴⁹ Mactavish gave it to Black along with parts of his own letters on the subject, but Black decided the case had not been presented entirely and sent his own version of it to the Governor and Committee.⁵⁰ Mactavish said he could not see how Black's version changed anything.⁵¹

The Company's Secretary, Thomas Fraser, answered that they had submitted the matter to a lawyer, who had decided that Black's action was irregular and illegal.⁵² Fraser therefore asked Black to retrace his steps and arrange the matter so there would be no further difficulty with Schultz.⁵³ Black, persuaded either by the Company's insistence or Mactavish's continued importuning, relented.⁵⁴

Arranging things so that there would be no further difficulty with Schultz proved impossible, however. Even before the settlement of the difference between Schultz and

⁴⁹A.H.B.C., D.9/1, Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 18 Dec 1866.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²A.H.B.C., A.6/41, Fraser to Mactavish, London, 16 Feb 1867.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴A.H.B.C., D.9/1, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 12 Mar 1867.

Black, in fact immediately on the Settlement's learning of the death of Chief Factor Clare in England early in 1867, Schultz launched a drive to get himself appointed to the Council in Clare's stead. Several petitions, inspired by Schultz himself, began circulating in the Settlement proposing Schultz's appointment.⁵⁵

These were followed by an opposing petition declaring that Schultz was not eligible and should not be appointed.⁵⁶ The pro-Schultz petition apparently was numerous signed,⁵⁷ but Mactavish explained that the Settlers, rather than be so discourteous as to refuse, "will sign anything one day and the reverse the next."⁵⁸ The Council of Assiniboia said that it was not a matter for it to decide and referred both petitions to the Governor and Committee of the Company.⁵⁹

Mactavish was opposed to Schultz's appointment for several reasons. One was that there were several men around with much better qualifications than Schultz.⁶⁰ Another was

⁵⁵A.H.B.C., D.9/1, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 5 Mar 1867.

⁵⁶Oliver, Canadian North-West, I, pp. 573-74, Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 7 Mar 1867.

⁵⁷A.H.B.C., D.9/1, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 12 Mar 1867.

⁵⁸A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 28 Apr 1868.

⁵⁹A.H.B.C., D.9/1, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 12 Mar 1867.

⁶⁰Ibid.

that Mactavish was convinced the pro-Schultz movement was not a spontaneous one but one gotten up by Schultz himself.⁶¹ A third was based on Schultz's general behavior:

Dr Schultz before even he was informed of the result of the Petition published in his newspaper the "Nor'-Wester" an article recommending the people refuse obedience to the Laws and altogether so insulting to the Council here that I am of opinion that he cannot be admitted as a member of Council. He will no doubt do his utmost to make trouble here, and to some extent he may succeed, but unless some question causing general excitement turn up I do not believe his influence will be very much felt.⁶²

Still, Mactavish wondered if Schultz's exclusion in the end might lead to more trouble than his inclusion.⁶³ Responding again to Mactavish's indecision, the Company replied that it inclined toward admitting Schultz, but would take no action until they heard further from Mactavish.⁶⁴ Mactavish never indicated he had made up his mind, but Schultz was never appointed.

One reason Schultz was not appointed may have been that before the year was out Mactavish and the Council found themselves once more entangled in Schultz's legal problems. In

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²A.H.B.C., D.9/1, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 18 Apr 1867.

⁶³Ibid., Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 12 Mar 1867.

⁶⁴A.H.B.C., A.7/4, Sir Edmund Head to Mactavish, London, 16 Apr 1867.

dissolving the Schultz-McKenney partnership several years before, Schultz had neglected to pay off his half of a debt owed to a man named F. E. Kew. Kew, in London, sued for it through an agent and Schultz was ordered to pay it. When Schultz refused, the Sheriff was sent to confiscate Schultz's goods. Schultz threw the Sheriff out. The Sheriff came back later with help and Schultz soon found himself in jail for assaulting an officer.⁶⁵

As the Corbett case had demonstrated, however, it was possible to mitigate jail terms in Red River through other than legal proceedings. A band of from fifteen to eighteen men led by Schultz's wife enveloped the jail, overpowered the constables on duty, broke open the prison doors, and "emportèrent Schultz sur leurs épaules, lançant en même temps un défi aux autorités de venir le reprendre."⁶⁶

Determined that Schultz should be forced to pay his debt to Kew, the Council of Assiniboia decided to enlist one hundred special constables to see that he did so.⁶⁷ Reporting to the Council later, however, Mactavish said he had not

⁶⁵de Tremaudan, Histoire de la Nation Métisse, pp. 155-56; Hargrave, Red River, pp. 423-28.

⁶⁶de Tremaudan, Histoire de la Nation Métisse, p. 155: "carried Schultz off on their shoulders, hurling defiance at the authorities."

⁶⁷Oliver, Canadian North-West, I, p. 583, Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 23 Jan 1868.

been able to find one hundred constables to act in the matter. There was, he said, a "want of a clear understanding among the people as to the object for which they were to be sworn in as special Constables, and the conditions under which they were to act."⁶⁸ Writing to the Governor and Committee two weeks later, Mactavish said he "had a force of Special Constables which would probably have overcome any opposition Doctor Schultz would have offered," but these apparently were Métis.⁶⁹ Eight hundred and four citizens, probably almost all Métis, had signed a petition "dénonçant, en termes énergiques, le mépris de l'ordre établi dont avaient fait preuve les amis de Schultz."⁷⁰ Mactavish, like Dallas before him, was adamant against using Métis to settle a problem with the English-speaking section of the community. Instead, he persuaded Black to grant Schultz a new trial, admitting to the Governor and Committee that he "did so solely on the grounds of expediency."⁷¹ The new trial proved a mistake. Introducing into it a former clerk who claimed he had seen

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 584-85, Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 5 Feb 1868.

⁶⁹A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 18 Feb 1868.

⁷⁰Hargrave, Red River, p. 434; de Tremaudan, Histoire de la Nation Métisse, pp. 155-56: "denouncing energetically the contempt for established order displayed by Schultz's friends."

⁷¹A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 18 Feb 1868.

Schultz pay off 275 pounds to Kew of the 296 pounds Kew claimed, Schultz got off with paying only 21 pounds.⁷²

The clerk was almost certainly perjuring himself.⁷³

Mactavish, feeling himself responsible for the miscarriage of justice, later paid off Schultz's debt to Kew himself.

The Corbett-Stewart and Schultz jail breaks, revealing that the length of time a prisoner spent in jail depended a great deal on how many friends he had, served to mock unmercifully an always weak but once-respected government. And in doing nothing about them the Company's government contributed to its own ridicule, revealing itself as next to powerless, able to enforce the law only among the law-abiding. It was an embarrassing revelation, and one that had only been hazily, if at all, realized before. That the Métis, making up almost a majority of the Settlement and comprising the only formidable armed force in the area, could coerce the Company in 1849 was a clear sign of weakness, to be sure, but that a group of agitators with no numbers, no armed force to speak of, and no standing in the community could with impunity flaunt the laws of the Settlement in the 1860's was a humiliating disclosure.

⁷²Ibid., Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 28 May 1868.

⁷³Ibid.; Hargrave, Red River, pp. 437-39.

And as the prestige of the government of Assiniboia disintegrated, so did the power of its courts. Never since the early days of the Settlement had the courts been able to enforce an unpopular decision, but the situation became ludicrous in the 1860's, when they could not even enforce a popular one--in the Schultz case, for instance, when if the matter had been decided by a vote of the Settlement Schultz probably would have been sent back to jail. And even the Métis, solid in their support of the government against the Canadians, remained otherwise a force to be reckoned with, as illustrated by the Desmarais case. John Desmarais, a Métis, in the summer of 1866 was tried before a jury for killing an Indian and was condemned to hang.⁷⁴ Soon after his conviction, petitions began coming in asking for the commutation of Desmarais' sentence. Mactavish consulted the magistrates who had tried the case, and they for three reasons decided the sentence should be commuted: (1) the murder had not been premeditated; (2) it had occurred while the prisoner was drunk, and arose out of irritation occasioned by atrocities committed by local Indians on the bodies of several Sioux murdered near the Settlement by other Indians; (3) it would be inexpedient to carry out the sentence in opposition to the desires of a very large section of the

⁷⁴A.H.B.C., D.9/1, Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 21(?) Aug 1866.

community.⁷⁵ Black was the only one disagreeing with the recommendation for commutation, and even he declined to oppose it.⁷⁶ Mactavish said:

In my own mind there is not a doubt about the policy of the commutation, as it may be doubted whether the sentence could have been carried out, and there is no doubt that if it had, it would have excited feelings that would not so soon have been allayed.⁷⁷

Desmarais was banished to British Columbia, "a proceeding I fear little justifiable, except on the consideration that the only way we have of punishing him is by imprisonment, which would keep up excitement, and it might end in his being liberated."⁷⁸

Mactavish soon after the last Schultz trial described the judicial situation in terms that would have held true for the entire decade of the 1860's:

. . . the General Court is quite unequal to what is required of it. While plain simple men only appeared before it, justice was carried out; but a change in the character of the suitors without alteration in the procedure before the Court has changed the circumstances, and now a very simple jury and as simple a Plaintiff or Defendant find themselves in the hands of a sharp scoundrel who frequently has matters all his own way. I am of opinion that till the character of the bulk of the

⁷⁵Ibid., Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, early Sep 1866.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid.

people alters, an independent judge sitting without a jury will be the only means of serving justice. The change however could not be effected under the Company's Government, my opinion regarding which I have already given you and the correctness of which every day's experience strengthens.⁷⁹

And this increasing judicial problem was intensified by the inadequacies of the local justices:

. . . most of the Councillors and Justices of the Peace now in commission are rather old and generally they were never very well suited to deal with such people as have for some years been coming into the Settlement, although they did very well and had considerable influence while they had none but Red River people to deal with.⁸⁰

Unfortunately, the law-abiding English-speaking Settlers of Red River were seldom law-enforcing, partly because of their natural passivity, partly because of the government's obvious and undeniable connection with the Hudson's Bay Company fur trade. Though only rarely, and in later years hardly ever, did the Company's business and its government overlap, there was always the latent suspicion that the government might be sacrificing the Settlement on the altar of business. It on no occasion did so after Dallas' departure in 1864, but the suspicion was never wholly erased.

Fortunately, suspicion was not nearly enough to arouse

⁷⁹A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, 28 May 1868.

⁸⁰A.H.B.C., D.9/1, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 18 Apr 1867.

the English-speaking population of Red River. The peculiar Settlement had grown a peculiar sort of people. What might have driven others to revolt drove them to apathy; what might have driven others to burst out in anger only drove them inward, to rumination. They showed early what they were later to demonstrate so conclusively--that it took more than politics, unrepresentative or otherwise, to stir them from their civic doldrums.

But if the agitation of the Canadian Party failed to arouse the English-speaking Settlers, it did succeed in solidifying its opposition. The Métis, the Company's most bitter enemies in the days of the fight for free trade, became during the 1860's its most ardent supporters. A major reason for this was the fact that the Métis under the later governments of Assiniboia had found political equality in the Settlement. Though making up almost half the Settlement's population, they were for long grossly under-represented on the Council. In 1835, for instance, of the thirteen local citizens on the Council, only one was a Métis; and he was Cuthbert Grant, Warden of the Plains, great favorite of Sir George Simpson, and thought by many to be merely a tool of the Company.⁸¹ As the years passed, more and more influential Métis were appointed to the Council, until by the early

⁸¹Garrioch, Correction Line, p. 143.

1860's Corbett was complaining that half the Council was made up of Métis and other Catholics.

Paralleling this was the growth of official recognition of the French language and Catholic faith. In 1852 the Council of Assiniboia by a vote of four to three granted fifteen pounds annually for local Catholic education.⁸² In 1856, when the French-speaking part of the population complained that they could not understand the official surveyor, the Council elected to hire two surveyors, one English-speaking, one French-speaking.⁸³ And in 1860 the Council voted to ban Council meetings and the holding of court sessions on a long list of Catholic religious holidays.⁸⁴

So an attack on the Company and the government of Assiniboia was tantamount to an attack on Métis interests. This became particularly true as the Canadians, reacting to Métis opposition, launched a side war against the French-speaking part of the Settlement that only made the Métis more violently opposed to Canadian annexation. As the two groups fed each other's animosities, bitterness increased until near the end the Canadians in the Nor'-Wester had become

⁸²Oliver, Canadian North-West, I, p. 388, Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 9 Dec 1852.

⁸³Ibid., p. 419, Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 27 Feb 1856.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 455, Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 27 Feb 1860.

almost unbearably insulting and the Métis fumed with scarcely suppressed hatred.

Unfortunately, the Métis support rallied by opposition to the Canadian agitation was a support that Mactavish was afraid to avail himself of for fear of starting the oft-mentioned civil war in the Settlement between the Catholic French and the Protestant English. To Mactavish, the threat did not seem worth the gamble. As J. J. Hargrave pointed out, "The agitation against that corporation proceeds, not from natives of the colony, or men possessed of much stake in it; but from recent arrivals, and men more destitute than they could desire of a property qualification for a voice in the Government."⁸⁵ Most of their numerous signed petitions were, as Mactavish said in one instance, "all humbug."⁸⁶ And far from representing the major portion of the community, they grew more and more isolated, and in the end found themselves surrounded by either indifference or outright hostility.

For paradoxically enough, local feeling toward the government of Assiniboia with the Settlers of Red River cannot be measured in terms of the agitation against it by the Canadians, the lack of active support given it by the English-

⁸⁵Hargrave, Red River, pp. 468-69.

⁸⁶A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 5 Jun 1868.

speaking segment, and the growing impatience of the Métis with its inactivity. In spite of all this--in spite of being despised, ridiculed and trampled on--the government remained, if not popular, at least acceptable. Isaac Cowie and de Tremaudan thought there could not have been a more contented community anywhere.⁸⁷ Alexander Begg, writing during the Resistance, said: ". . . the Hudson Bay Company have been misrepresented--they are not nor have they for the past twenty years been unpopular to the majority of the settlement."⁸⁸ And in 1862, Bishop Taché wrote:

The Officers of the H. H. Bay [sic] Company charged with public affairs, are not only popular, but I am happy to say that our entire population entertains for the Governor of Assiniboia, the excellent Mr. Mactavish, a feeling of deep felt gratitude and of profound respect. His excellent qualities have enabled him to accomplish all the good he has done here. . . .⁸⁹

Reasons for this apparent "popularity" seem to be considerable. Begg listed them as follows:

The laws of the land were mild; the taxation was very light; the land could be obtained from the Company on easy terms; produce always found a ready market with the Company; the Hudson's Bay Company served as bankers to the people free; the churches and schools were largely

⁸⁷Isaac Cowie, The Company of Adventurers (Toronto, 1913), pp. 158-60; de Tremaudan, Histoire de la Nation Métisse, p. 156.

⁸⁸Begg's Journal, pp. 157-58.

⁸⁹A.H.B.C., A.12/43, Bishop of St. Boniface to Dallas, St. Boniface, 15 Dec 1862.

indebted to the Company for support⁹⁰

Elsewhere, Begg went on to say that whatever the government's faults may have been they were light ones. Although the Settlers realized the Company was too weak to enforce the laws, there still was never a general feeling of discontent toward it. On the contrary, Begg says, they felt themselves free in every respect. They were content with their small voice in the government, and the fact that the laws amounted more to arbitration than law suited the Settlement better than another system.⁹¹

Even the Nor'-Wester joined in the praise, though only in a historical article that can hardly be said to have represented the newspaper's editorial viewpoint: "The Council, as at present constituted, is a fair representative of the people, in many respects. It is composed of French, English, and Scotch members. So far well, surely; for these represent different parts of the community, as to nationality."⁹² Members come from all races, all religions, and all sections of the community, the article went on. ". . . on the whole, the Council contains a dozen of about as good men as can be picked in the Settlement." Elective institutions

⁹⁰Begg, Creation of Manitoba, p. 11.

⁹¹Begg's Journal, pp. 153-54.

⁹²Nor'-Wester, Saturday, Sep 1861.

must come, the article continued, but it is premature to talk of getting them now:

We cannot bear the expenses of the system to which they would inevitably lead. Our present system, besides giving general satisfaction, is a very cheap one. This is a great matter. We are not burdened with taxation, nor are we demoralized by corruption in high places. . . . elective institutions would be a doubtful gain.⁹³

Bishop Taché even held that the Company was quite fair in picking its Councillors:

It is well known that these Nominees are chosen among the most respectable and the most intelligent of the place. Moreover the Company has, even in this choice, evinced generosity, as several of the Members of the Council have personal interests diametrically opposed to the commercial interests of the Company. To my knowledge the Company went so far as to consult those interested, and the greater number of the Councillors have been appointed because such appeared to be the desire of the population in general.⁹⁴

Writing in 1870 during the Rebellion, Anglican Archbishop Robert Machray gave a Protestant view that brought the testimonials up past the government's demise:

Certainly since my arrival in this country which was in 1865 the Government of this country under the Company was neither oppressive nor unpopular. No appointment was made--no law was enacted but by the Voice of the Council of Assiniboia. That Council consisted of the leading members of the Community. It has been sufficiently indicated under very adverse circumstances this Winter that they were the very men that the people would have voluntarily chosen. The Judge at the head of the Magistracy Black was a

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴A.H.B.C., A.12/43, Bishop of St. Boniface to Dallas, St. Boniface, 15 Dec 1862.

most honourable man universally respected for his rectitude.⁹⁵

But, as already pointed out, it was a passive sort of popularity, not given to overt demonstrations such as responding to calls for temporary constables to restore law and order. The community had been brought up to accept what it could get from the Company and its government, not to help it in any way, and it was a habit Mactavish was never able to overcome.

Neither was he able to remain unperturbed in the face of the unceasing cacophony of Canadian agitation, and he was particularly bothered by a version of it going on in Canada proper. Taylor wrote:

I have known Governor McTavish since 1859, and have observed that his aversion to Canada and Canadians has been constantly increasing. The persistent agitation by the Canadian Parliament, and by the press of the Western Province /Ontario/, against the charter organization and policy of the Hudson /sic/ Bay Company, has annoyed him, but he has often said that the worst result has been to make turbulent citizens of all Canadians, who have emigrated to Red River.⁹⁶

In 1868, Mactavish said:

I see that in Canada officials high in position are descanting on the condition of things here under the Company's rule, the said condition being entirely imaginary and quite at variance with fact. But what

⁹⁵Begg's Journal, p. 502, Machray to Sir John Young, 18 Mar 1870.

⁹⁶P.A.M., Letters received by U. S. State Department from Agent for Red River Affairs, J. W. Taylor to Hamilton Fish, Washington, 25 Jan 1870.

is to become of a country, the premier of which makes statements to the assembled Commons which rest on no better authority than that of such men as Dr. Schultz and James Ross⁹⁷

And Mactavish thought he saw method in the Canadian Government's practice. Speaking of the activities of the Honorable William McDougall before and during his mission to England to close a deal with the Company for Rupert's Land, Mactavish later said that McDougall was encouraging political disturbance in Red River to precipitate the downfall of the government of the Company in Red River and thus put the Company in an awkward position for bargaining.⁹⁸ If such was the case, it was in vain, for when the Company was finally to agree to sell its rights in Rupert's Land to Canada in 1869 it would be at a price that had nothing to do with the agitation in Red River or the decrepit state of the government there.

⁹⁷A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish probably to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 21 Apr 1868.

⁹⁸A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letter, Mactavish to Joseph Howe, Fort Garry, 14 May 1870.

CHAPTER VII

A YEAR OF PEACE

Local disturbance trailed off during the latter part of 1868 and the first half of 1869, partly because of the near-famine that struck Red River in 1868, partly because of the conclusion early in 1869 of the negotiations for the transfer of the North-West to Canada. Like the summer of 1867, that of 1868 brought clouds of grasshoppers to Red River Settlement to strip the crops to the ground. Unlike 1867, however, 1868 brought other minor disasters that mounted into a major one. Fishing catches fell off sharply, the buffalo hunts failed, and even small game became scarce.¹ Drought made matters even worse. And as food supplies thinned out, prices went up. A large part of the Settlement faced famine, and full-scale efforts to ward it off were launched. The Council of Assiniboia voted all the money at its command, sixteen hundred pounds, for relief.² The Hudson's Bay Company in London, immediately on learning from Mactavish of the distress, voted five hundred pounds³ for relief

¹Begg's Journal, Intro. by Morton, p. 17.

²A.H.B.C., A.12/45, An Appeal from the Red River Executive Co-operative Relief Committee, n.d.; Alexander Begg, History of the North-West (Toronto, 1894), I, p. 365.

³A.H.B.C., A.6/42, W. Armit to Mactavish, London, 19 Sep. 1868.

and set about making a public appeal for Red River aid, quickly collecting another fifteen hundred pounds.⁴ They placed the money at Mactavish's disposal to spend as he saw fit, telegraphing the news to St. Paul, from where it was relayed on to Red River.⁵

Money also began coming in from St. Paul, and later from Canada, and to handle its use a "Red River Co-operative Relief Committee" composed of about forty members was formed.⁶ Later, when it became obvious that the Red River committee was far too large to work with, an executive committee composed of leading clergymen and merchants was formed from it to actually distribute the supplies.⁷

"Very much against my desire I have been appointed chairman

⁴Ibid., Armit to Mactavish, London, 26 Sep 1868; Ibid., W. G. Smith to Mactavish, London, 10 Oct 1868.

⁵See preceding footnote; A. S. Morton referred to the sum sent by the Company as 5,000, not 2,000 pounds. His error most probably was caused by the peculiar ability of a Hudson's Bay Company letter transcriber to write 2's that looked like 5's: Morton, History of Canadian West, p. 866; E. E. Rich also arrived at a figure considerably higher than 2,000 pounds, but this seems to have been due to his including in the sum the cost of seed wheat sent later by the Company, which the Company intended as a loan, not a donation.

⁶A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 17 Oct 1868.

⁷Ibid.

of both Committees," Mactavish reported.⁸

By October, however, after the Council had voted sixteen hundred pounds and the Company had telegraphed news of the two thousand pounds coming from England, Mactavish began to fear that the wants of the Settlement had been a trifle exaggerated. He told the London office of this feeling, reporting at the same time that quite a few of the poorer Settlers had gone to the lakes to fish and support themselves.⁹ A month and a half later, he reported that a large number of people in the Settlement had applied for relief, and that if it turned out that all of them needed it there would not be enough food to supply them. "Still people do not seem very desirous to work for Mr. Snow at £3 wages per month and their provisions, and the whiskey shops in the neighbourhood never want customers."¹⁰ Mactavish, in fact, may have been instrumental in limiting the relief coming from England. The Company made only a limited effort in collecting the fifteen hundred pounds; it probably could have collected a good deal more but was

⁸Ibid.

⁹A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 10 Oct 1868.

¹⁰Ibid., Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 24 Nov 1868.

restrained by Mactavish's intimations that not much more, if any, would be needed.¹¹ By January, however, Mactavish had changed his mind and was making direct appeals to Canada through letters to newspapers in that country.¹² The extent of his miscalculation was partly illustrated by a letter he wrote to Bishop Taché later in the year, dated 4 September 1869:

I notice your success in Lower Canada (Province of Quebec I believe I should call it) in collecting for the Relief Committee here, but I believe my respected countryman, the Honorable John S. Macdonald has been too tough a subject. No account yet of the \$5,000 voted by the Ontario Government. The honorable gentleman has not answered my letter at all, and I am told that some of the Upper Canadian papers advocate the retention of the grant, as they say it is not required by the R. R. settlers. I can tell them otherwise, as how to satisfy the claims against the Relief Committee has been a subject of some anxiety to me.¹³

The Hudson's Bay Company complained that the Nor'-Wester was giving credit to everyone's donations to Red River relief but the Company's. It offered to send more money if Mactavish wanted it, and asked Mactavish to try to get the newspaper to give it and the Council of Assiniboia the

¹¹A.H.B.C., A.6/43, W. G. Smith to Mactavish, London, 16 Jan 1869.

¹²Morton, Manitoba, p. 115.

¹³Canada: Report of Select Committee, 1874, Taché Testimony, pp. 9-10.

credit it deserved.¹⁴ The following month, February 1869, the Company at Mactavish's request announced it was sending five thousand bushels of seed wheat to the Settlement. The Settlers were to pay for it with part of the fall 1869 harvest, and they were to pay only what it cost the Company to supply it.¹⁵

Canada decided to combine its official contribution to Red River relief with a more practical enterprise, the continuing of a road building project designed to link Red River with Canada through Canadian and British territory. Canadian Governments had for years wanted to open the land and water route between Lake Superior and Red River¹⁶ and in May 1867 had started work on the road in the Thunder Bay Area. By the summer of 1867 the road had moved six miles toward Red River.¹⁷

Supervising the project was the Canadian Minister of Public Works, the Honorable William McDougall, one of the principal advocates of annexation of the North-West to Canada. The call for aid for Red River Settlement in the

¹⁴A.H.B.C., A.6/43, W. G. Smith to Mactavish, London, 6 Feb 1869.

¹⁵Ibid., W. G. Smith to Mactavish, London, 20 Feb 1869.

¹⁶Begg's Journal, Intro. by Morton, p. 18.

¹⁷Hargrave, Red River, p. 418.

summer of 1868 gave McDougall an opportunity to extend the road-building right into the Settlement even before its take-over by Canada, thus strengthening Canada's heretofore rather tenuous ties to Red River and the North-West and, by ignoring the Hudson's Bay Company, perhaps loosening the Company's title to the territory. He dispatched a party under John A. Snow to begin building the Red River end of the road. Snow was to hire Red River people to work on it, and by paying them in provisions was ostensibly to contribute thereby to the relief of Red River distress.

The Canadian Government had no legal right to carry on road-building projects in the Hudson's Bay Company's territories, but McDougall here set the pattern for later Canadian Government policy by treating the Company's officers in Red River as if they were not there. Stanley said of the omission:

It is not clear whether this was simply an oversight or actually deliberate. If the latter, it may be regarded as an ungracious assertion of the traditional Canadian view that the Hudson's Bay Company had never had a good title to the country; if the former, it was inexcusable in a Minister of the Crown.¹⁸

Early in October 1868, Mactavish began picking up rumors of Snow's impending arrival and of the fact that he

¹⁸ Stanley, Louis Riel, pp. 50-51.

was to start building some sort of cart road.¹⁹ Later, Mactavish heard that he was "said to be an agent of the Canadian Government."²⁰ Several weeks of such rumors finally culminated in the arrival in the Settlement of Snow himself early in November, an odd time to start building a road in the Red River area.²¹ Mactavish reported to the Company that:

On his arrival here he called on me to show his instructions from the Commissioner of Public Works /McDougall/. These proclaimed nothing of any consequence /illegible/ a hope on the part of the Commissioner that the Company's agent here would offer no opposition to Mr. Snow's operation but would leave the matter entirely in the hands of the Imperial Government, which, as generally people here regard Mr. Snow's arrival as opportune on account of the scarcity of provisions, I agreed to do, and without instructions to protest against Mr. Snow's action /I do not?/ think it political to do so.²²

A month and a half later, on 26 December, Mactavish expanded on the subject:

When Mr. Snow on his arrival here spoke to me on the subject of his mission I felt at some loss what to say, as had I formally protested against his beginning work, from there being a general feeling that it would be a public benefit he should proceed; my interdict would

¹⁹A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 10 Oct 1868.

²⁰Ibid., Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 23 Oct 1868.

²¹Ibid., Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 11 Nov 1868.

²²Ibid.

have excited a feeling in the Settlement which would have shown itself so unmistakeable that it would probably have led him to go on with the work notwithstanding. Under those circumstances, I judged it best to leave the matter in the hands of the Imperial Government as he proposed, at least until I had positive instructions from the Governor and Committee, which I presume would only be given in case they were absolutely required to protect the Company's interests.²³

The Governor and Committee replied that they "entirely approve of the course you adopted with reference to the application by Mr. Snow on the part of the Canadian Government for permission to construct a road from Fort Garry to the Lake of the Woods!"²⁴ But the Company took the precaution of filing a formal protest of the Dawson Road project to keep its title clear while the negotiations with the Imperial Government for the transfer were proceeding.²⁵

Meanwhile, the road was abuilding. At first, Snow hired only thirty men for the project, but he later increased this to forty.²⁶ Each worker received four pounds worth of rations per month, apparently raised from the three pounds

²³A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 26 Dec 1868.

²⁴A.H.B.C., A.6/43, W. G. Smith to Mactavish, London, 6 Feb 1869.

²⁵Begg's Journal, p. 527n.

²⁶A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, 22 Dec 1868; Ibid., Mactavish to W. G. Smith, 22 Jan 1869.

per month mentioned by Mactavish.²⁷ A dispute broke out over the low pay and over the fact that the provisions the workers were paid in were computed at higher prices than those prevailing at Fort Garry. As Morton pointed out, the complaints were unjustified. The wages paid were the same as those paid workers on the eastern section of the road, and the economic situation existing in 1868 probably forced Snow to pay higher prices for the provisions.²⁸ The fact that Red River workers were being paid at the same rate paid at the other end of the road, however, casts more light on the extent to which humanitarianism prompted McDougall and the Canadian Government to begin building a road in Red River that it had planned eventually to build all along.

More trouble was caused by Snow's paymaster, a gentleman named Charles Mair. On arriving in the North-West, Mair had quickly become a champion of its annexation to Canada, and had written a letter to his brother in Perth, Ontario, describing ecstatically the virtues of the area.²⁹ Mair's brother gave the letter to the Perth Courier, which published it, after which it was copied by the Toronto Globe and other

²⁷Hargrave, Red River, p. 450.

²⁸Begg's Journal, Intro. by Morton, p. 18.

²⁹Ibid.

Canadian papers. Unfortunately for Mair, he had heightened the letter's readability with colorful comments on social life among Red River women, and when details of the letter gradually worked their way back to Red River they earned for Mair a public horsewhipping by Mrs. A. G. B. Bannatyne, a sister of Mactavish's wife.³⁰ Mactavish himself had been stung by Mair's satirical remarks on the half-breed women of the Settlement, remarks that would take in not only Mactavish's wife but ninety per cent of the rest of the women in town. At a dinner party in his home one evening, the subject of the letter came up and Mactavish, seldom one to contain his feelings in conversation, denounced Mair hotly and claimed that his own wife's manners would grace any table.³¹ Mair further isolated himself from a large part of the Settlement and brought discredit on the road partly by associating himself closely with John Schultz.³²

Oddly enough, though Snow's road rapidly lost popularity, and though some of the men he brought with him from Canada, none of whom were French, incidentally,³³ stirred up a considerable amount of animosity in the Settlement, Snow

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Morton, History of Canadian West, p. 866.

³²Begg's Journal, Intro. by Morton, p. 18.

³³Ibid.

himself apparently retained a certain popularity. Hargrave, writing presumably around the early part of 1869, said that Snow "is a person who, during his short residence in the colony, has secured public respect."³⁴

But from almost any angle, the Canadian road building project was a failure. Purportedly undertaken to relieve distress in Red River, reopen contact between Red River and Canada, and extend the road, it did little of any of these. Alexander Begg summed up the result:

The whole conduct of the undertaking was marked from first to last by a series of injudicious acts on the part of the men in charge, and the results were most unfortunate at that particular time. Governor McTavish felt it incumbent on him to write a letter on the subject to Hon. Wm. McDougall, who, in reply, made the following singular statement: "that the money appropriated towards the work on the Lake of the Woods road was intended for the relief of the settlers, as the Hudson's Bay Company had done nothing for the starving people of Red River." /The italics are probably Begg's./ We have seen how much truth there was in the latter part of this assertion, and, as for the first, a very small amount of the money expended passed into the hands of the starving people. The whole amount paid out on this work was about \$30,000, and it might just as well have been dumped into the Red River for all the good it did to Canada, or to the settlement. It was the cause of the first of the disturbances that broke out among the half-breeds in opposition to the transfer of the country to Canada. . . .³⁵

While the Settlement was preoccupied with its problems during the winter of 1868-69, the transfer of the North-West

³⁴Hargrave, Red River, p. 459.

³⁵Begg, History of North-West, p. 375.

to Canada was finally arranged. The transfer had been thirteen years in the making. The British House of Commons had in 1857 appointed a Select Committee to study the Hudson's Bay Company's general operating policies and to obtain at the same time information on the potentialities of the North-West, the ultimate aim being to decide whether the Imperial Government should renew the Company's license to trade in the North-West territory outside of Rupert's Land and on British North America's Pacific coast. The license was due to expire in 1859. As Douglas McKay pointed out,

the Company was in an uncomfortable position; it had to defend monopolistic practice at a time when political and social liberties were expanding rapidly; and it had to defend its own government at Red River and on Vancouver Island. Primarily a trading organization, its maintenance of colonial government within its territories had been an unavoidable obligation. Government had become part of its work, and though it could not be called a democratic administration, neither was it as utterly autocratic as some of the restless settlers at Red River and on Vancouver Island would have the British Government believe.³⁶

Nevertheless, the Select Committee after it was all over recommended the renewal of the Company's license, with two reservations. The first was that a Crown Colony be set up for Vancouver Island and the Pacific coast; the second was that provisions be made for Canada's acquiring the Red and Saskatchewan River valleys.³⁷

³⁶MacKay, Honourable Company, p. 258.

³⁷Ibid., p. 273.

These recommendations in effect served notice that the Company's local governments in Red River and Victoria were not long for this world, and the point was not lost on the Company. From 1857 on, the Hudson's Bay Company's governmental operations in Red River assumed all the aspects of a holding action. When the Settlement's chief judge resigned in 1858, the Company delayed getting a replacement until they got a better idea of the British Government's intentions, figuring that a judge they hired and brought out to the Settlement quite likely would not be kept on by the Canadian Government if it shortly took over the Settlement.³⁸ But as the Company gradually realized that the transfer of the territory was not likely to take place with any dramatic suddenness, it resumed its search in 1860 for a chief judge,³⁹ a search that resulted two years later in the posting of John Black to the Settlement.

The same hesitancy to make any substantial changes in the Settlement held true for land titles in Red River. The Company recognized that the land title situation there was in a ridiculous state.⁴⁰ Though some land had been bought

³⁸A.H.B.C., A.6/35, Fraser to Mactavish, London, 24 Feb 1860.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰A.H.B.C., A.11/96, Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 27 Jul 1860.

from the Company, and so was held under some sort of title, much of it was held only by "squatter's rights."⁴¹ As Simpson explained in 1857: "Hitherto there has been no necessity for a more systematic mode of proceeding, land being of so little value that few persons were disposed to produce or cared for titles." Simpson recommended, though, that then was not the time to straighten the situation out --that any big change should be postponed until the Company's future connection with the country was defined more clearly.⁴²

One of the things holding up this "definition," was the Imperial Government's toying with the idea of contesting the Company's rights under the charter in an attempt to invalidate the Company's claims for compensation for the rights they surrendered.⁴³ Preoccupied with this thought, the Government allowed the Company's license to expire in 1859 without taking any action or arriving at any decision on the matter at all.⁴⁴

This seemed to suit Sir George Simpson, who was beginning to have doubts as to whether the Company's monopoly was

⁴¹Hargrave, Red River, p. 309.

⁴²A.H.B.C., A.12/8, Simpson to W. G. Smith, Lachine, 11 Sep 1857.

⁴³A.H.B.C., A.12/10, Simpson to Mactavish, St. Paul, 22 May 1860.

⁴⁴A.H.B.C., D.4/56, Simpson to Mactavish, Lachine, 15 Aug 1859.

worth the trouble the Settlers were beginning to give the Company's government. Bringing Mactavish up to date on the situation, Sir George wrote in August of 1859 telling him of the expiration of the license, which terminated the Company's governmental jurisdiction in the area. He went on to say that the Imperial Government had introduced a bill into Parliament for temporarily managing the Indian territory:

I am requested to impress on you that as no responsibility now rests on the Company in reference to the maintenance of good order, or the welfare of the Indians in the territory lying beyond their chartered limits, you will understand that, for the future, you are to confine your attention wholly to the business of the Fur Trade, and, while paying cheerful obedience to the regulations Her Majesty's Government may establish, you are to take no part in carrying such regulations into effect.⁴⁵

Simpson seems to have thought, mistakenly, that the expiration of the license changed the Company's status in Red River. The Imperial Government took no action on the 1859 bill, nor did it renew the Company's license. It did abandon the idea of contesting the Company's rights under the charter, however, and admitted the Company's claims for compensation for surrendered rights.⁴⁶

Rumors persisted into the 1860's of the imminent

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶A.H.B.C., A.12/10, Simpson to Mactavish, St. Paul, 22 May 1860.

transfer of the territory from the jurisdiction of the Hudson's Bay Company. The St. Paul Press in 1863 predicted the early transfer of the Red River area from the Company to the British Government.⁴⁷ And in September 1865 the Nor'-Wester carried two articles discussing Canada's negotiations with the Company for their territorial rights in the North-West, with Britain to guarantee any loan they needed.⁴⁸

The Company itself was anxious for some sort of transfer to be concluded, suggesting continually through the 1860's that the Crown buy its title to the southwest part of the North-West and take over the governing of it.⁴⁹ Nothing ever came of the Company's proposals. By 1868, Mactavish was telling the Company that he hoped arrangements for the transfer would be concluded soon because "I am convinced that the Company's interest will suffer most from delay in their conclusions."⁵⁰

But little happened until 1867. Before that there had been a spasmodic campaign on the part of the Canadian

⁴⁷Nor'-Wester, Wednesday, 8 Jul 1863.

⁴⁸Nor'-Wester, Friday, 23 Sep 1865.

⁴⁹For details on this subject, see Rich, Hudson's Bay Company, II, Chap. XXX

⁵⁰A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 14 Apr 1868.

Government down through the 1860's to acquire the North-West and to acquire it for nothing. But not only was it unwilling to buy the Company out, it was also unwilling to contest the Company's title before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. Negotiations had faltered partly because Canada was preoccupied with confederation, but they were given a new boost by a clause in the British North America Act, specifically providing for Canadian westward expansion. The path was further cleared in 1868 by the passage by the British Parliament of the Rupert's Land Act, and in the fall of that year the Canadian Government dispatched two Commissioners, the Honorable William McDougall and Sir Georges-Etienne Cartier, to England to negotiate with the Company. The negotiating groups began some distance apart. The Company wanted one million pounds; Canada wanted to give nothing. After considerable haggling, the British Government suggested quite forcefully to Canada that she pay three hundred thousand pounds for the Company's rights, and equally forcefully to the Company that it take it. Canada agreed, and the Company followed suit on 9 April 1869.⁵¹

The agreement provided that the British Government guarantee a loan to Canada of three hundred thousand pounds sterling, which Canada was to pay over to the Hudson's Bay

⁵¹A.H.B.C., B.235/c/1, W. G. Smith to Cowan, London, 10 Apr 1869.

Company when the Company surrendered its rights to the British Government.⁵² The Rupert's Land Act had already provided that when the Company transferred its rights to the Imperial Government it in turn would have to transfer the North-West to Canada within one month. In addition to the 300,000 pounds, the Company was to retain certain plots of land near their forts and trading posts, and was to be given two sections in each surveyed township, which gave the Company more than one-eighteenth of the land area in the North-West if it were all surveyed. The Canadian Government undertook to respect the rights of the Indians and half-breeds in area concerned.⁵³

Canada in June 1869 passed its own act establishing a territory in the North-West. It called for a Lieutenant Governor and Council appointed by Canada. Old laws were to remain for the time being unless they conflicted with the Dominion Constitution. New laws were to be subject to the approval of the Canadian Parliament.⁵⁴

The original date set for the transfer was 1 October 1869. Canada later asked for a two-month delay, to 1 December 1869, to allow her more time to complete financial and other

⁵²Beckles Willson, The Life of Lord Strathcona (London, 1915), p. 158.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Nor-Wester, 26 Jun 1869.

arrangements.⁵⁵

The Company kept Mactavish fully informed of all it knew regarding the transfer, which unfortunately was not a great deal. On 20 March 1869 the Company's Secretary, W. G. Smith, wrote to tell Mactavish that a meeting of the shareholders would be held on the 24th or possibly 26th of March to consider the proposal made to the Company by the Colonial Secretary. At the same time Smith sent along a packet of correspondence that had passed between the British Government and the Company regarding the proposed transfer.⁵⁶ On 10 April 1869, Smith wrote to say that at a stockholder's meeting held the day before the terms proposed for the surrender of the Company's rights in Rupert's Land had been accepted.⁵⁷

A gap then occurred in the correspondence while Mactavish was visiting Canada and the Company in England. On 11 September 1869, Smith wrote to tell Mactavish that they still had not received the 300,000 pounds from Canada.⁵⁸

⁵⁵United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River (London, 1870), p. 1, Despatch, Sir John Young to Earl Granville, Halifax, 25 Aug 1869.

⁵⁶A.H.B.C., D.10/1, probably from W. G. Smith to Mactavish, London, 20 Mar 1869.

⁵⁷A.H.B.C., B.235/c/1, W. G. Smith to Cowan, London, 10 Apr 1869.

⁵⁸A.H.B.C., D.9/1, W. G. Smith to Mactavish, London, 11 Sep 1869.

Smith said that the Deed of Surrender and the Order in Council for the Transfer of Rupert's Land had been ready for some time but that the transfer would not be made until the money was forthcoming. A week later Smith reminded Mactavish that "no time should be lost in making arrangements to meet the altered state of things which will arise from the transfer of Rupert's Land to the Government of Canada, the date of which has been fixed for the 1st of December next."⁵⁹ Canada had just changed the transfer date, as mentioned above.

On 19 October 1869, the Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company wrote Mactavish personally asking him to instruct all the Company's employees to cooperate fully with the Canadian Government.⁶⁰ Northcote pointed out that hereafter they would be working under the Canadian Government and would need their help and cooperation, and whether they got it or not would depend to a great extent on their behavior toward the new government. Four days later, Smith wrote Mactavish enclosing letters from Northcote to Mactavish and McDougall.⁶¹

⁵⁹Ibid., W. G. Smith to Mactavish, London, 18 Sep 1869

⁶⁰A.H.B.C., A.7/4, Sir Stafford Northcote to Mactavish, London, 19 Oct 1869.

⁶¹A.H.B.C., A.6/43, W. G. Smith to Mactavish, London, 23 Oct 1869; see Appendix G for further discussion of transfer.

But if the Company had little information on the transfer to convey to the Settlement, the British and Canadian Governments, it would seem, had none; at least none came from either of those sources:

. . . Governor Mactavish, the Council of Assiniboia, and the inhabitants generally of Red River heard of the negotiations for the transfer of Rupert's Land to the Dominion, but they heard of them at second hand--from reports in newspapers and other indirect sources; they were given no official, authoritative information by either the Imperial or the Dominion Government⁶²

And Mactavish said:

The Act in question referred to the prospective transfer of the Territory, but up to this moment we have no official intimation from England, or the Dominion of Canada, of the fact of the transfer, or of its conditions, or of the date at which they were to take practical effect upon the Government of this country.⁶³

Later, he told McDougall: "I am still without any official notice of the Imperial Order in Council, and must act, if at all, upon the information contained in the private letters from Sir Curtis Lampson [Deputy Governor of the Company], which announces the date of transfer agreed to by the Imperial Government to be 1st December next."⁶⁴

⁶²Robert Machray, Life of Robert Machray (London, 1909), p. 169.

⁶³United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 38, Mactavish to McDougall, Fort Garry, 9 Nov 1869.

⁶⁴Ibid.; p. 47, McDougall to Howe, Pembina, 25 Nov 1869.

But informed officially or not, Mactavish knew he was nearing the end of a long road. By the time the transfer negotiations had been concluded in April 1869 he had been Governor of Assiniboia for more than ten years, longer than any of his predecessors. Much had happened in the Settlement in that ten years besides agitation and the slow crumbling of the government. Before 1858, the Settlement's only means of freight communication with the outside world was virtually through the annual Company ships touching at York Factory. By 1869, most of the Company's and the Settlement's freight was coming in through St. Paul, and it was not restricted to the one trip per year that formerly held true. And where before 1858 nothing man-made had plied the Red other than the canoes and barges of the Company, the later years of the 1860's saw its waters roiled by an dependable but fairly persistent paddle-wheel steamboat. And mail which on Mactavish's arrival in the Settlement had been arriving in and leaving the Settlement on an entirely irregular schedule, dependent largely on whether travellers happened to be heading in the right direction, now passed to and from the outside world at least once a week. And the Settlement had grown by more than two thousand people, approximating twelve thousand souls by 1869. In that time, too, the Settlement had gotten its first newspaper, the operations of free traders independent of the Company had expanded

considerably, and the nucleus of the future metropolis of Winnipeg had been formed, appropriately enough by Canadians.

Even the Company had changed considerably, and the change contributed to that taking place in Red River. Before 1858, the regular, almost exclusive, supply route from England to the North American fur trade ran through York Factory. By 1869, this route had been replaced by the far more flexible one through St. Paul. Though the new route brought with it occasional customs problems, and though the Company apparently suffered on occasion from the loose supervision of American freight firms,⁶⁵ it proved so much more practical for general logistics reasons that Red River gradually replaced York Factory as the main Rupert's Land point of entry for Hudson's Bay Company supplies. At the same time, the general merchandizing in the Company store at Fort Garry grew spectacularly, from almost nothing in the 1840's to the point in the 1860's when it made Fort Garry the most important center of general trade in the territory.⁶⁶

A more subtle change took place in the Council of Assiniboia, at least in the image it projected. In 1858 it was inherently weak, but it was a weakness that had not crystallized in the minds of the Settlers. By 1869, it had

⁶⁵Rich, Hudson's Bay Company, II, p. 794.

⁶⁶Ibid.

revealed itself to one and all as all but helpless. And though this recognition had little effect on the allegiance paid it by the vast majority of the Settlers, it showed certain minority groups that they could get away with far more than would have been the case in a well-governed community. The government of Assiniboia, never a truly influential force in the Community to the point of inspiring active support, ceased during the 1860's even to pretend to that influence. Any active support the Government got during its last decade came not from the most logical source, the English-speaking Settlers, but from the French Métis, and this was not so much support for the government as opposition to the Canadians. The government of Assiniboia, in short, had by the end of the decade clarified itself into a nullity.

First hand comments on Mactavish's ten years' administration range from favorable to the exact opposite. Tuttle said that Mactavish:

though possessing great ability as well as great kindness of disposition, was yet trained up from his youth, in the most remote districts of the Hudson's Bay Company, in the narrowest of their peculiar beliefs in regard to their position in the country, and in the carrying out of which he at once reversed the liberal policy of his predecessor /Dallas/. The newspaper was placed under a ban, and the advent of Canadians and the possibility of its continuance was looked upon as dark and foreboding.⁶⁷

Since the newspaper was never banned and the liberal policy

⁶⁷Donald Gunn and C. R. Tuttle, History of Manitoba (Ottawa, 1880), p. 311.

was Mactavish's, not Dallas', it is difficult to tell how far Tuttle's opinion here is to be relied on. He is joined, however, by McArthur, who said:

William McTavish was a man of great shrewdness and penetration, and, as I have said, his government of the district on the new peace lines was remarkably well conceived and carried out, but his early and long life training spoiled him for coping with such a product of freedom and civilization as the press. He was a Scotch Highlander, the son of a judge in the county of Argyle. When a boy he entered the company's service as an apprentice at York Factory, where in due time he became Governor. He had spent his whole lifetime in the interior trading with Indians, receiving goods as they came once a year from England, taking from the traders who came from the inland country the furs they brought down to York each year, sending their furs back on the yearly ship to London, his annual accounts going along with them, and finishing up the year's work by despatching the brigade of boats which had arrived with furs back again with goods for next winter trading. His duties at Fort Garry were somewhat different and included the civil government of the colony. But even here the Governor or chief officer was supreme. The only appeal from his authority was to Fenchurch Street the Company's headquarters⁷, and the appellant had to depend upon the Governor for the conveyance of his letter of complaint. Indeed the local Governor at Fort Garry one time issued an order that all letters leaving the settlement should be left open for his inspection.⁶⁸

The unsealed letters incident, of course, occurred under Governor Christie in 1844. McArthur here describes excellently the theoretical powers of the Governor of Assiniboia. That this theory found no counterpart in reality apparently escaped him.

Swinging to the opposite extreme was a New Nation

⁶⁸McArthur, "Causes of the Rising," p. 4.

article published in May 1870, when Mactavish's departure from Red River brought forth a premature eulogy.⁶⁹ A more balanced appraisal perhaps was that made by James Wicke Taylor in January 1870:

He has occupied the latter position for twelve years under very difficult circumstances. It devolved upon him to conduct the business of the corporation at that central point of distribution to fifty interior stations, scattered over a region as large as European Russia; and also to administer the local government of Selkirk, assisted by a Council of the inhabitants appointed by the Company on his nomination. He had found great embarrassment in combining these trusts. It often happened that the interest of the Company, and his own, was directly affected by his action as Governor and Chief Magistrate. He is a man of great integrity and discretion, but has not escaped censure, to which he is very sensitive.⁷⁰

In May 1869, Taylor had said that "all testimony concurs that this most embarrassing of positions could not have been occupied by a man of better intentions, greater discretion, or greater prudence."⁷¹ At another time during that same month, Taylor referred to the Mactavish administration as having been "eminently . . . conciliatory."⁷²

⁶⁹Winnipeg New Nation, Friday, 29 May 1870; see Chapter XII.

⁷⁰P.A.M., Letters received by U. S. State Department from Agent for Red River Affairs, Taylor to Fish, Washington, 25 Jan 1870.

⁷¹P.A.C., Taylor Papers, draft of letter from Taylor to Toronto Globe, 18 May 1869.

⁷²Ibid., draft of letter from Taylor to Chicago Tribune, 24 May 1869.

But if Mactavish's record as Governor of Assiniboia elicited varied responses, his record as Governor of Rupert's Land did not. Both the men under him and the Company itself expressed their satisfaction. The Company recorded it repeatedly in official correspondence throughout the decade. William J. Christie, in charge of Edmonton House and son of former Governor of Assiniboia Alexander Christie, spoke for the North American officers when writing in January 1870 of Mactavish's illness:

I sincerely hope he will so far recover as to be fit for business again, as I don't see who can fill his place at present, under illegible circumstances, his loss would be a material calamity. How would Dugald Mactavish's brother do to replace him. We want a working Governor not one like we had before Dallas, with a high salary to do nothing, but upset everything.⁷³

Whether Mactavish thought his reign as Governor of Assiniboia a success or not, there was no doubt that he looked forward quite contentedly to giving up his authority, such as it was, to Canada in the fall of 1869. Taylor wrote in May 1869, as Mactavish returned from England, that he "has returned to Fort Garry, and will await with his accustomed patience, the appointment and arrival of a Canadian successor."⁷⁴ Taylor went on to say that Mactavish was in excellent spirits, and that "the Governor's only regret is that he is

⁷³A.H.B.C., A.11/99, W. J. Christie to W. G. Smith, Edmonton House, 5 Jan 1870.

⁷⁴P.A.C., Taylor Papers, draft of letter from Taylor to Chicago Tribune, 24 May 1869.

not yet an ex-Governor: and his chief solicitude on taking his seat on the train to St. Cloud was for the safety of a valuable barometer across the prairies of Northern Minnesota."⁷⁵

Mactavish had left England on 21 April to return to Red River by way of Canada and St. Paul.⁷⁶ He had stopped by Ottawa to offer the Canadian Government his advice on the Settlement, but they had not been interested.⁷⁷ He returned to a still-quiet Settlement. The main governmental problem that had confronted him during the winter had been the resignation of John Black. Black had handed in his resignation as head of the Red River courts in August 1868, intending to retire to England as soon after the session of the May 1869 Quarterly Court as possible.⁷⁸ Commenting on it at the time, Mactavish said: "There is no doubt his position in the present state of affairs here is very unpleasant, but from his living at a distance from here he has escaped many disagreeable contingencies and has been exposed to them only at long intervals."⁷⁹ Black's resignation was accepted by

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Nor'-Wester, 15 May 1869.

⁷⁷McArthur, "Causes of the Rising," p. 2; see Chapter XIII.

⁷⁸Hargrave, Red River, p. 462; A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 11 Aug 1868.

⁷⁹A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 11 Aug 1868.

the Governor and Committee.⁸⁰

But by February 1869 the Company had changed its mind, and, deciding that it would be in the best interests of the Company if a change in the judicial arrangements were not made at that time, asked Black to stay another year.⁸¹ Black declined. Stating that his arrangements for leaving had gone too far, he said:

In explanation of that part of Mr. Smith's letter, which refers to Gov. Mactavish having expressed an opinion, that I might be willing to remain another year, if the Company's convenience were to require it,--I wish to add, that, from what passed between Gov. Mactavish and myself before I received the acceptance of my resignation, and before my arrangements for leaving the Country had proceeded far, he had good reason for forming such an opinion; because, in conversation on the subject with Gov. Mactavish, I gave him to understand, that, if thought desirable by the Company, I might remain a little longer. But, after receiving the unqualified acceptance of my resignation, and after committing myself to the arrangements referred to, my position was entirely changed.⁸²

But Black was still in Red River in August 1869, and Mactavish was writing to the Company that Black was refusing to agree to any further engagement extending over a term short of a year.⁸³ Black did not leave the Settlement, in fact, until

⁸⁰Ibid., Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 11 Nov 1868.

⁸¹Ibid., J. J. Hargrave to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 23 Mar 1869; Ibid., Cowan to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 27 Mar 1869.

⁸²Ibid., Black to Cowan, Red River, 24 Mar 1869.

⁸³Ibid., Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 24 Aug 1869.

March 1870.

Soon after his arrival back in Red River, Mactavish left for Norway House to preside at the annual Council of the Northern Department. On his return, he was confined to his room. By early October he was once more contemplating retiring.⁸⁴ He was fifty-five, and he was extremely ill. If he were to reap in quiet retirement what he had sown in long years of toil, he knew he had better get at it before it was too late.

In fact, the transfer was coming none too soon for Mactavish for he was entering on an advanced stage of tuberculosis. The disease might have had its origin in 1866. In the late summer of that year, he reported that he had caught a severe cold that settled in his lungs, and that he had been sick all summer.⁸⁵ By the summer of 1868, he was so ill that he considered retiring. Just before leaving for the Council of the Northern Department at Norway House in that year, he wrote: "I am far from well and am seriously thinking whether or not I should to Council give intimation of my retirement, if I continue to decline as I have lately I will be nearly useless by the end of the Outfit [June 1869] and dont feel

⁸⁴A.H.B.C., A.11/99, W. J. Christie to W. G. Smith, Edmonton House, 5 Jan 1870.

⁸⁵A.H.B.C., A.12/44, Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 22 Aug 1866.

inclined to remain to be an object of pity."⁸⁶

When Mactavish visited England in the spring of 1869, he did so largely to seek medical advice,⁸⁷ but if he got any it was of mediocre quality. He returned to Red River in the summer weaker than ever but apparently unaware of the exact nature of his condition. By August 1869, he was confined to his room,⁸⁸ where he remained more or less continually until his departure from the Settlement in the spring of 1870.

As the transfer neared, the Council of Assiniboia, Black presiding in the absence of the increasingly ill Mactavish, adopted a letter of appreciation for the man "who had so long and so acceptably presided over their body."⁸⁹ The letter said in part:

The Council have learned with very deep regret that you are in such a delicate state of health. They venture to express the hope that you will not refuse to yourself such relaxation as may give you the prospect of early recovery.

To yourself personally they would wish to convey their most affectionate regards. Whilst you were looked to by every member of the Council as the most

⁸⁶A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish probably to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 5 Jun 1868.

⁸⁷New Nation, 29 May 1870.

⁸⁸A.H.B.C., A.11/99, W. J. Christie to W. G. Smith, Edmonton House, 5 Jan 1870.

⁸⁹P.A.M., Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 19 Oct 1869.

fitted to guide their deliberations, there was no one who less pressed his opinions, or, listened more courteously to any suggestion that was made.

The Council know well how inestimable your services are to the Honorable Company and how devotedly you have given yourself to their business; yet your ear has ever been open and your advice ready for the poorest settler who was in any difficulty.

The Council therefore, while thanking you for all your invariable Courtesy when at the head of their Board would express the hope that you may be soon restored to health and that your valuable life may be long spared.⁹⁰

The letter brought Mactavish to the threshold of deliverance from the tyranny of local politics he had labored under for so long.

⁹⁰Ibid.

CHAPTER VIII

THE RETURN OF STRIFE

But the year of comparative peace had ended, and its ending forecast trouble ahead. The transfer as it approached increasingly gave rise within the Settlement to resentment and fear. As time went on, and no official declarations or commissioners bearing official information on the transfer and future policy arrived from either Canada or England, the Settlers came to realize that they were being totally ignored. This grew into a widespread grievance. The English-speaking Settlers had no great longing in the first place to be annexed to Canada. Their lives, both social and economic, had been almost totally separate from Canada,¹ and they felt little more kinship with that country than they did with the United States. And quite a few of the English half-breeds were worried about their land titles. Many titles were held by "squatting" rights alone, and the lack of clear title plus lack of reassurances from Canada gave birth to rising apprehension.² Still, though they were disgruntled and disturbed --to some extent even fearful--they gave no thought to opposing actively the coming transfer.

But if the English were less than enthusiastic about

¹Stanley, Birth of Western Canada, pp. 48-49.

²Ibid., p. 61.

the coming change, the Métis came to be downright hostile to it. One reason was they were more excitable. Another was they had more to fear. Where many of the English Settlers held their land only by squatting rights, nearly all of the French did so. Furthermore, the Métis feared their culture would be blotted out--their religion interfered with and their language trampled on. Additionally, the average Métis was generally uneducated, spoke little English, knew nothing of constitutional government, and did not understand the relationship between the Company, the British Government, and Canada.³ Hence the currency given the constant references by their leaders to the Company's having "sold" them.

Still, though the Métis like their English-speaking neighbors did not want a change, they too would not have opposed the transfer had not their fears for their land, language, and religion been cultivated by their leaders and their Roman Catholic clergy, and had not all their fears been underscored by the activities of the local Canadian Party and the lack of reassurances from the Canadian Government. As Mactavish said: "They seem to have been fully, if not correctly, informed of how the Government was to be composed, and they seemed to think that, from what was told, their interests would be overlooked and their religion interfered

³John Castell Hopkins, The Story of our Country
/Philadelphia, about 1912/, pp. 361-62.

with.⁴

Periodically the Canadians reminded the Settlers, particularly the Métis, of the precariousness of their land titles. In the late spring of 1869 several Canadians with the road party at Oak Point (St. Anne's) started buying land from the Indians that was already claimed by Settlers, paying for it with provisions and whiskey.⁵ They were ejected by the Métis. In July, a group of Canadians began staking off Hudson's Bay Company land in the vicinity of Fort Garry. Mactavish reported:

I regret to say that there is at present considerable excitement in the Settlement apparently caused by the proposed arrangements for the transfer of the Country to Canada. Several individuals have taken claims on the Reserve in the immediate neighbourhood of this establishment in the expectation that their right to the land will be acknowledged.⁶

Later in the year, Canadians were once more active at Oak Point, staking off land for themselves that already belonged to Settlers. Again, the Métis chased them out.⁷

⁴United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 2 Nov 1869.

⁵Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874, p. 123, Bannatyne testimony.

⁶A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 24 Jul 1869.

⁷Ibid., Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 7 Sep 1869; A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letter from Mactavish to Howe, Fort Garry, 14 May 1870.

And when a further report circulated that Snow and Mair were trying to buy up more land from Indians that was claimed by others, a mob of Métis brought Mair to Fort Garry and demanded he be forced to leave the country. Mactavish interceded for Mair, and it later turned out that the land-buying had been led by Schultz, not Mair or Snow.⁸ Schultz at one time asked Colonel John Dennis, the leader of a Canadian survey party, if claims by Canadians at Oak Point would be recognized by the Canadian Government. Dennis said they would not be.⁹ Irritated at this constant thwarting, the Canadians began announcing that they would soon have another government in Red River that would teach the local people a few things about law.¹⁰

The involvement of Canadian road workers in the land-grabbing escapades, and the suspicion that Snow and Mair were mixed up in it, led the Métis to identify these activities with the Canadian Government. As Mactavish pointed out:

Very unfortunate for Mr. Macdougall was the impression that even then prevailed in the Colony that he was determined to support his subordinates in everything and was although at the time employed with Sir George

⁸Hargrave, Red River, p. 458.

⁹Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874, pp. 186-87, Dennis testimony.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 123, Bannatyne testimony.

E. Cartier as Canadian Commissioner in England, encouraging political disturbance in this place . . .¹¹

Métis' fears for their land were further fed by Canadian reaction to an episode that took place near the Settlement during the summer of 1869. A number of Canadians had arrived from Canada in the spring of 1869 and elected to settle at a place called Muskrat Creek, located a considerable distance from the Settlement and beyond the limits of the land rights purchased by Selkirk in 1817. The Indians had already been made uneasy by the gradual spreading out of the Settlement, and they decided to make a stand at this latest encroachment on what they regarded as their own preserve. In the face of Indian opposition, the new settlers asked help from Mactavish. Mactavish, about to leave for the Council at Norway House, appointed Councillor James McKay to try to work something out. McKay eventually gained permission from the Indians for the Canadians to settle on the land on the agreement that their doing so would not compromise Indian rights when it came time for the Indians to settle with the Canadian Government.¹²

The Canadian press interpreted the incident rather oddly, publishing reports that the Company was deliberately

¹¹A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letter from Mactavish to Howe, Fort Garry, 14 May 1870.

¹²Ibid.

encouraging the Indians to make claims against the Canadian Government. William McDougall, hearing of the affair, complained to the Hudson's Bay Company in London.¹³ The attitude displayed on this occasion by McDougall and other prominent Canadians toward the Indian title--giving the impression that Indian titles were to get short shrift from Canada--merely confirmed the suspicion of the half-breeds that Canada intended to ignore their own land rights.¹⁴

Pouring more coals on the fire, were other local Canadians. Persistently cheating the Métis in business,¹⁵ openly and repeatedly referring to them as cowards,¹⁶ and predicting that they "would soon be driven from the country, or kept as cart drivers to bring in the vehicles of the new immigrants,"¹⁷ these Canadians did little to ease Métis apprehensions. Periodic Canadian flag-raising became a local phenomenon, around which increasing numbers of

¹³Willson, Life of Lord Strathcona, pp. 164-65.

¹⁴A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letter from Mactavish to Howe, Fort Garry, 14 May 1870.

¹⁵P.A.C., MacDonald Papers, Vol 101, Part 2, J. J. Hargrave to Sir Curtis Lampson, Fort Garry, 8 Feb 1870.

¹⁶A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letter from Mactavish to Howe, Fort Garry, 14 May 1870.

¹⁷William McCartney Davidson, Louis Riel (Calgary, 1955), p. 113.

Canadians "rallied with wordy patriotism,"¹⁸ denouncing Americans, Fenians, and French half-breeds alike,¹⁹ and generally leaving no doubt as to who would be running the Settlement once Canada took over. And as the Métis watched, knowing full well what the policy of these raucous, unscrupulous, pseudo-patriots would be toward them, they began not only fearing for their survival as a cultural group but boiling with rage at the personal abuse being heaped upon them. A large part of the Métis population, in fact, was becoming a latent mob, requiring only a leader to bring it to life; and Louis "David" Riel leaped, melodramatically, into the breach.

Louis Riel was the son of Louis Riel, Sr., the leader of the Métis in the 1849 Sayer crisis and, if James Ross is to be believed, a "great public nuisance."²⁰ The younger Riel had been born in Red River in 1844, and had been sent east by the Church to be educated at the Collège de Montréal. His education was prematurely terminated at that institution in 1865 for one reason or another, and he spent the next three years in eastern Canada, Chicago, and St. Paul before

¹⁸A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letter from Mactavish to Howe, Fort Garry, 14 May 1870.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Nor'-Wester, Saturday, 14 Sep 1861.

returning to Red River in July 1868. Though he was later to cut an impressive figure throughout the Rebellion, with four hundred armed Métis behind him, and even long after, with most of French Canada behind him, he cut something less than that when he first returned to the Settlement in 1868:

Riel, at that time, was an ordinary town loafer. He lived with his mother, up the river a few miles on the east side, and it was reported that his mother supported him entirely, as Riel was never known to earn anything himself by manual labor. He used to hang about the saloons a good deal, and usually brought his lunch from home, which was exclusively of fish, caught and prepared by his devoted mother. But notwithstanding his indolence, and general good-for-nothingness, he was a handsome, college educated, and well-dressed fellow, and apparently waiting for something for him to do suitable to his tastes.²¹

The rising tide of Métis discontent in the fall of 1869 not only solved Riel's unemployment problem but satisfied his vanity and gave expression to his main talent as well, for Riel was an orator of surprising strength:

Those who have listened to Riel when speaking on this hobby of his, and when at his best, as he was in 1869, will readily admit that as a speaker in his own language, addressing his own people, he was possessed of marvelous power to excite and dominate according to his pleasure.²²

Throughout the fall Riel and the Métis held meetings to try to unite in a course of action. One of the first of

²¹P.A.M., Extracts from George B. Winship's account of Events at Red River 1869-70 (unpub., 1914), Chap. vii, pp. 4-5.

²²George Young, Manitoba Memories (Toronto, 1897), p. 102.

these appears not to have been Riel-inspired, however. At this meeting, held on 29 July 1969, it was proposed that the 300,000 pounds being paid the Company be given to the Métis instead, and that the Métis seize the public funds in the Settlement and set up an independent government of their own "to treat with Canada or any other country."²³

Mactavish appeared briefly and stated in answer to questions that he did not know whether the Company was going to divide the 300,000 pounds with the natives of the country or not, and that he did not know whether the Canadian Government was going to give the natives a separate sum for themselves.²⁴ The proposals were voted down, with Louis Riel, interestingly enough, voting against them, according to G. F. G. Stanley. Stanley described the meeting as follows:

The meeting was held on July 29, and the court house was filled to overflowing. Dease, although he was only one of the signatories, was clearly the moving spirit of the meeting. But Dease was not trusted by the French métis. Although his mother was French-speaking, and Dease himself was often looked upon as a French métis, he was suspected of being in Dr. Schultz's pay, and the French métis would not follow him.²⁵

A Catholic priest, Father N. J. Ritchot, also said that Schultz was behind the meeting, the object being to direct

²³Begg, Creation of Manitoba, pp. 85-89.

²⁴McArthur, "Causes of the Rising," p. 5.

²⁵Stanley, Louis Riel, p. 56.

Métis animosity away from Canada toward the Hudson's Bay Company.²⁶ Alexander Begg was another who thought the meeting was instigated by the Schultz group, but with the aim being to deprive the Company of its rights in the country and thereby strengthen the claims of local Canadians to the land they had staked out.²⁷

That the Canadians were behind the meeting is doubtful. Either that or the meeting dealt with proposals that could only have dismayed them. A proposal that the land belonged to the Indians, not the Company, might have suited them, since they had been busy buying up land from the Indians that the Indians did not own, but a general rising of the Métis could not have fitted in with their plans. And that the Canadians were trying to redirect Métis hostility is also doubtful. Not only did the Canadians show elsewhere their lack of interest in redirecting Métis hostility but with the transfer arranged and about to take place they would have seen little reason for redirecting this hostility. In any case, probably the last thing the Canadians wanted in the summer of 1869 was a general Métis rising, against the Company or anyone else.

Possibly Riel himself was behind the meeting, getting

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Begg, Creation of Manitoba, pp. 85-89.

it up to test the political climate then voting against proposals he favored when he saw they lacked support, but this too is unlikely. Dease apparently lost popularity among the Metis as a result of the meeting,²⁸ and had Riel been behind it Dease would probably have said so later. And Dease was not connected with Riel during the uprising that came in the fall. It would seem then that Dease was either acting on his own or that if prompted by the Canadians he did not follow their script closely. In any case, Dease later showed a certain amount of leadership ability in heading a group that looted a Company store in St. Boniface.

Soon after this gathering the Metis began holding meetings at which they discussed the question of organizing armed resistance to what they saw as the coming oppression. These were lent urgency by the announcement that William McDougall, the Canadian Minister for Public Works, identified with the road project and notoriously anti-Catholic and anti-French, had been appointed as the first Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Territories. Every new development in the transfer, it seemed, only fed the swelling currents of resentment, and the Settlement gradually took on an alien, pervading air of tension.

²⁸Begg, Creation of Manitoba, p. 89.

Canada chose this time to begin a survey of Red River Settlement in preparation for the flood of immigration from Canada expected the next year. In June 1869, the Governor General of Canada, Sir John Young, had telegraphed the British Colonial Office asking it to ask the Hudson's Bay Company for permission to survey lands for settlement before the actual transfer so Canada would not lose a season.²⁹ The Company wrote to Mactavish on 10 July telling him to permit the survey.³⁰ Mactavish was not at all pleased. He replied:

It was I see impossible for the Governor & Committee to refuse the assent requested, but it is unfortunate that any Survey should be commenced till the Canadian Government was in authority here, as the whole land question is fruitful of future troubles which it will take much time and great labor to settle. I expect that as soon as the survey commences the Half breeds and Indians will at once come forward and assert their right to the land and probably stop the work until their claim is satisfied, the difficulty is one that, situated as we are here, it is hard to see how to meet.³¹

A week later, Mactavish wrote:

Colonel Dennis with a party of surveyors (6 in all) has arrived here with the intention of proceeding with the surveys. He proposes commencing by surveying over again the portion of the settlement included in the survey made under the Company, with a view to fix

²⁹A.H.B.C., A.6/43, W. G. Smith to Mactavish, London, 10 Jul 1869.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 16 Aug 1869.

legally the boundaries of all the lots. Some feeling has already been shewn by the Canadian halfbreed population who appear to think that there can be no necessity for surveying their lands until they desire it themselves.³²

John Stoughton Dennis and his team of surveyors had been sent by William McDougall, in his capacity of Canadian Minister of Public Works.³³ Soon after arriving, Dennis reported to Ottawa that the half-breeds would probably object to any survey until their claims had been investigated and settled by the Dominion Government.³⁴ Dennis was told to go ahead with the surveys anyway, but to stop if he met with opposition.³⁵

Dennis went to work. The original surveys had been made from base lines following very irregularly the sinuosities of the rivers. Dennis's new lines, following the American township system, bisected lots in many places, sometimes passing through buildings or leaving buildings on a neighbor's farm.³⁶ The Métis, as O'Donnell said:

. . . were very much alarmed, feeling that their property, which they had occupied so long, was to be rendered

³²Ibid., Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 24 Aug 1869.

³³Machray, Life of Robert Machray, p. 170.

³⁴Willson, Life of Lord Strathcona, pp. 163-64.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶O'Donnell, Manitoba as I Saw It, p. 29.

valueless, or to be deteriorated in value; and perhaps that fear had been taken hold of by some unscrupulous persons to exaggerate the supposed grievance for their own purposes.³⁷

In any case, deciding they had better make a stand before it was too late, a group of Métis on 11 October stopped some surveyors who were running a base line toward the river lots of St. Vital.³⁸ In spite of the warning he gave previously, Dennis must have been taken by surprise. He had earlier discussed the matter of the surveys and their intention with Riel at length, explaining that Métis rights were to be safeguarded. Riel had left with Dennis the impression that he had been entirely satisfied by Dennis's assurances.³⁹ When the survey was stopped Dennis took the matter to Cowan, asking him to bring it to Mactavish's attention,⁴⁰ and Mactavish later reported:

I am also sorry to have to inform you that some of the people here have stopped one of Colonel Dennis' Surveying parties, and as usual of course the Colonel came to us for redress. The men who have thus interfered say they know the survey could proceed without injury to anyone, but stopping it is always a beginning; and they are desirous to let the Canadian Government

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Morton, Manitoba, p. 120.

³⁹Ibid., p. 119

⁴⁰Canada: Correspondence and Papers Connected with Recent Occurrences in the North-West Territories (Ottawa, 1870), pp. 7-9, J. S. Dennis, Memo on opposition of French to surveys, 23 Oct 1869.

know that it is not wanted by them; that they consider, if the Canadians wished to come here, the terms on which they were to enter should have been arranged with the local government here, as it is acknowledged by the people in the country. Dr. Cowan is at present doing his utmost to persuade the malcontents to withdraw their resistance to the survey as the easiest mode of getting over the difficulty. I regret to say that I have been so ill for some time as to be unable to go about, and am quite unequal to the slightest exertion.⁴¹

The day after the survey stopping, Mactavish interviewed one of the leaders of the affair, apparently Riel, in Mactavish's home in Fort Garry:

. . . one of the leaders in the movement against the survey was brought to speak to me and put my getting this off by the mail out of the question besides knocking me up horribly for the remainder of the afternoon. It does not seem to have been of much use beyond confirming a previous suspicion that the Priests have somehow countenanced the movement. If so they are breaking up their own people, as I think the majority are against the movement.⁴²

During the interview, Mactavish had tried to convince Riel that he was acting illegally, and that the survey would have no effect on their lands or rights.⁴³ Riel remained adamant,⁴⁴ but Mactavish still retained a measure of optimism. Answering a note from Dennis asking for an interview,

⁴¹A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 12 Oct 1869.

⁴²Ibid., Mactavish probably to W. G. Smith, 13/16 Oct 1869.

⁴³Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874, p. 126, Cowan testimony.

⁴⁴Davidson, Louis Riel, p. 29.

Mactavish agreed to one, and continued:

Matters from information that has reached me, look serious; but it is very difficult, judging of affairs of this kind here; and sometimes when the case looks bad, the whole thing subsides. I have seen to [sic] many difficulties here got over quietly to despair until the worst has taken place; but I must allow, there are incidents in the present case that have not been in former troubles.⁴⁵

But this tentative optimism was misplaced. Cowan reported to Dennis on 15 October that:

I very much regret to say that we have failed entirely in our endeavours to get over the opposition of the French Settlers to the survey.

Governor Mactavish has done all in his power, in the present state of his health, and every effort has been made by Mr. Goulet and myself, to persuade these men, but to no purpose.

I believe they are now of opinion that we are influenced unduly in favor of the Canadian Government, so that it is in vain for us to have any further correspondence with them at present.⁴⁶

By 16 October, Mactavish was forced to report:

I had hoped before closing to be able to say that the half breeds had withdrawn their objection to the surveys, but it is not so--they are getting more and more Decided. I am still under the conviction that the priests have something to do with it, but of course I don't [show?] my suspicions and will not be likely to establish them at least till the half breeds are convinced they have made an error. I am told Mr. McDougall left Ottawa some time ago and the papers have [puffs?]

⁴⁵Canada: Correspondence and Papers Connected with Recent Occurrences in the North-West Territories, pp. 9-10, Mactavish to Dennis, Monday afternoon.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 9, Cowan to Dennis, Fort Garry, 15 Oct 1869.

about his bringing up a number of stands of arms-- breech loaders--these people will never learn--it will be reported here that arms are coming and circulated that it is to force the half breeds to submit.⁴⁷

Meanwhile, there occurred the peculiar visit of the Honorable Joseph Howe, Canadian Secretary of State for the Provinces. Howe's visit was supposed to have been unofficial, and Howe did all he could to give it that appearance. He made a good impression on Mactavish:

The Hon Joseph Howe is here just now, a shrewd clear headed man. He very soon made out his whereabouts and readily avoided Dr. Schultz's offers of accommodation. He told me today that he was perfectly astonished to find the state of matters here and that without any means it was most wonderful how things had been kept together. He will be here for some time yet and I have no doubt from his own observations he will be able to set some of his colleagues right in their ideas about Red River.⁴⁸

Mactavish seems also to have made a favorable impression on Howe. Writing to McDougall later, Howe said: "I hope that Mactavish, who is much respected, will take a seat in Council and give you cordial support."⁴⁹ But in addition to refusing Schultz's hospitality, Howe also refused that of Mactavish.⁵⁰ He was intent on giving himself as much freedom of action as possible. On 16 October 1869, he

⁴⁷A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish probably to W. G. Smith, 13/16 Oct 1869.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Willson, Life of Lord Strathcona, p. 176.

⁵⁰Davidson, Louis Riel, p. 35.

wrote to MacDonald:

Have been here a week and shall leave for home in three or four days. I shall probably meet McDougall on the way and will give him the benefit of my observations. For many reasons, which I will explain when we meet, my visit here has been opportune and useful. Any number of absurd rumours were afloat when I came and a good deal of strong prejudice had been created. Some fools wanted to get up addresses and have me speak at a public meeting. This I declined, but by frank and courteous explanations to leading men who largely represent the resident population have cleared the air a good deal, and I have done my best to give McDougall a fair start. All will now depend on his tact, temper and discretion.⁵¹

Howe was apparently quite satisfied with the treatment and assistance he got in the Settlement:

I must say that Governor Mactavish met me in the most friendly way, and placed in my hands the records of the old Council of that country, and these I studied for two days. I procured and brought home for the use of the Minister of Justice a copy of the laws as they exist in that territory, that the Government might know the laws to which the people were accustomed. I also attained a list of names of old councillors, so that the Government might know in making appointments how to select men of experience in whom confidence had been reposed already.⁵²

But when Howe left Red River he brought out with him the conviction that Canada in contracting to pay out three thousand pounds for the North-West had made a horrible mistake. Meeting Alexander McArthur on his way to St. Paul,

⁵¹P.A.C., MacDonald Papers, Vol. 116, M.G. 26, A 1 (e), Howe to MacDonald, Winnipeg, 16 Oct 1869.

⁵²Willson, Life of Lord Strathcona, pp. 174-75.

Howe "commisserated me on the untoward fate which led me to such a foresaken country and seriously advised me never to think of remaining there as it would never come to anything."⁵³ McArthur said Howe was going to advise the Canadian Government to give up the project at the sign of the least opposition and keep their three hundred thousand pounds.⁵⁴ Writing to a friend in Canada, Howe said:

My visit to Red River has utterly cured me of any lingering hope I may have had of a peaceable transfer. The only thing we can do now is to minimize the extent of the mischief. Trouble is bound to come either before or after, and if it were not for Mr. McDougall and the extent to which we have pledged ourselves, I would say let us keep our hands out of this Manitoba business into which we have been hurried and which promises to jeopardize our Government and the interests of Confederation. It will be hard to pull out now, but if we see a chance of it we must do it. This country is not necessary to us, and at this stage it will only be a drag upon our energies and resources.⁵⁵

This letter obviously does not jibe well with that written to MacDonald a week earlier. Howe's apparent inconsistencies do not stop here, however. Back in Red River, "Mr. Howe had made himself very popular,"⁵⁶ and his method appeared to be that of being all things to all men. According to a Major James Wallace, A. G. B. Bannatyne, postmaster, Councillor of Assiniboia, and Mactavish's brother-

⁵³McArthur, "Causes of the Rising," p. 6.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Willson, Life of Lord Strathcona, p. 173.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 172.

in-law, said that Howe told him on several occasions that he approved of the course the half-breeds were taking, and that if they held out they would get all they wanted from the Canadian Government.⁵⁷ Henry McKenney, Schultz's half-brother, confirmed Bannatyne's statement, according to Wallace.⁵⁸ Wallace further reported that Howe told Bannatyne "that Mr. McDougall was unpopular in Canada, and hinted at the probability that he would make himself so if allowed to govern Red River."⁵⁹ J. H. Ashdown, a local Canadian, much later stated that "it was commonly reported here at that time that he [Howe] told the rebel sympathizers to stand up for their rights as Nova Scotia had done, and they would get them."⁶⁰ An American annexationist named Hugh F. O'Lone came away from a talk with Howe convinced that Howe was as much of a "republican" as he was, and that Howe would never be a party to forcing the Settlement into subjection to Canada.⁶¹

There is even the suggestion that Howe contributed indirectly to the setting up of a road block to bar McDougall.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰P.A.M., Red River Disturbances, J. H. Ashdown to G. B. Winship, Winnipeg, 24 Mar 1914.

⁶¹Willson, Life of Lord Strathcona, p. 173.

Davidson said that at a meeting the Métis held before erecting the road block, they were told that Howe at a private dinner had predicted that Canada would not complete the transfer until the Lieutenant-Governor was securely established in the country.⁶²

Discussing the matter later in the House of Commons, McDougall charged Howe's actions during his visit with being the main reason affairs in Red River took such a serious turn. "The rebellion would have been a mere trifling affair," he said, "had it not been sustained by the advice and recommendation of the Secretary of State."⁶³

Howe, of course, denied it all.⁶⁴ More significantly, however, his denial was supported by Mactavish. Discussing the fact that Howe had been the only Canadian official to avoid compromising himself by associating with Schultz and the Canadian Party, Mactavish wrote in May 1870:

I may be in error, but it is to this most creditable course of action on your part supported by a rather amusing coincidence illegible of dates that I have always attributed the origin of the atrocious and most calumnious rumors to your disparagements which were circulated after your return to Canada. I have

⁶²Davidson, Louis Riel, p. 30.

⁶³United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 146, House of Commons debate taken from Ottawa Times, 4 May 1870; the debate took place on 2 May.

⁶⁴Morton, History of the Canadian West, p. 876.

the utmost pleasure in bearing witness to my deep sense of the propriety which marked your deportment as a statesman of the dominion independent of local partisanship, during your visit to this place of last autumn and my absolute rejection of any assertion imputing to you language unbecoming your position.⁶⁵

Mactavish here provided an answer to what would otherwise appear to be a peculiar spectacle--that of a Canadian Government official deliberately fomenting rebellion in Red River. Except for the statement made by the Métis leaders, who when trying to incite their followers were seldom reliable, and that made by O'Lone, a gentleman of, to put it charitably, questionable character, all the accusations emanated from Canadians who had it in for Howe. Ashdown was a member of the Canadian Party snubbed by Howe. McDougall, as will be seen later, seldom got anything right during his trip out west. And Mactavish disposed of Wallace:

Major Wallace . . . appears to have been commissioned to act as a spy. I have made diligent inquiry into some matters relating to the visit of the person in question to the settlement and the probability of his having arrived at the true sentiments of those with whom he came in contact. I am informed that the plan taken by "The Major" to win the confidence of his interlocutors was free indulgence in coarse and unseemly abuse of the gentleman in whose interest he had come. By some people these representations were speedily swallowed as the sentiments of a person who had enjoyed the privilege of long intimacy with the object of his abuse and was therefore a reliable authority; but by the more intelligent of his hearers,

⁶⁵A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letter Mactavish to Howe, Fort Garry, 14 May 1870.

the major's deportment caused him to be regarded as a schemer, or a man lacking discretion to a dangerous degree. On the whole, I am inclined to think the mission of Major Wallace an error of judgment on the part of its originator.⁶⁶

Admittedly, the adverse testimony is given credence by Howe's attitude toward Canada's acquisition of Red River. He clearly was not in favor of acquiring it, and this feeling might have inspired a certain looseness in his comments on certain aspects of the transfer. Too, the value of Mactavish's favorable testimony is lessened by the fact that he was sick in bed during Howe's visit and so was not in the best position to pass on the subject. And it was at least unfortunate that Howe deliberately decided against acting as an official Canadian Government representative presenting Canada's future policy for the North-West publicly in unmistakable terms. Still, accusations such as those McDougall made need a good deal more evidence to back them up than has come to light, and on the evidence that has appeared Howe can be accused of no more than failing to make his remarks in Red River quite as precise as would have been desirable. His visit merely takes its place in the long list of errors, or possible errors, leading to the Rebellion.

⁶⁶Ibid.

CHAPTER IX

THE RISING OF THE METIS AND THE FALL OF FORT GARRY

By the time Howe left the Settlement the Métis had stopped the survey and it was fairly obvious that serious trouble lay ahead. Howe might have seen more of it than he did, and might have had further opportunity to do something about it, if not for difficulties Riel was having. In spite of the excitement among the Métis, and in spite of Riel's oratorical efforts, Riel had during the fall made little headway promoting active resistance among the stable, settled farmers of the Métis population.¹ They did not particularly care for Riel, and like their English fellow-Settlers, they, though apprehensive, were not enough so to rise in rebellion. They were more inclined to sit and wait. Riel had to bide his time until the more active and excitable part of the community, the buffalo hunters and tripmen of the boat brigades, returned to the Settlement. It was in them that Riel was to find the core of his force. With them, his "fiery speeches fell on very inflammable material."² They "were naturally of stormy spirit--daring rough-riders

¹Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874, pp. 9-10, Taché testimony.

²R. G. MacBeth, The Making of the Canadian West (Toronto, 1905), p. 37.

of the plains, who brooked no interference from anyone, and who had passed through many a conflict with their darker brethren on the wild wastes of the West."³

Mactavish had been aware of the Métis meetings during the fall but was at first inclined to feel that the excitement "had no very deep root."⁴ Furthermore, he could learn of no practical course of operation having developed from the meetings, and he thought that things would be settled amicably on McDougall's arrival in the Settlement:

There has been during the autumn considerable agitation among the Canadian half-breed population here, regarding the Government to be established here . . . but it appeared as if the course they meant to take was to await the arrival of the Honourable William McDougall, who, they understood, was coming here as Governor, and then endeavor to make such arrangements with him as would secure their rights and interests.⁵

But by the end of August Father Dugas was writing to Bishop Taché, who was away from the Settlement visiting Canada on his way to an Ecumenical Council in Rome, that "it is said the Governor is fearful but I believe that there is no danger yet."⁶ By September Mactavish was writing Taché, who was

³Ibid.

⁴United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, pp. 185-86, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 16 Nov 1869.

⁵Ibid., p. 187, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 2 Nov 1869.

⁶Begg's Journal, p. 410.

still in Canada, that "I have never seen the people here in the restless excited state they are now."⁷

What did happen, however, took Mactavish and the English-speaking part of the Settlement entirely by surprise. On 21 October, just a few days after Howe left the Settlement on his way back to Canada:

. . . a party of French half-breeds took possession of the road to Pembina, erected barriers at intervals, the head-quarters of the movement being at a spot named St. Norbert, about nine miles from Fort Garry. Their declared object was to interrupt the march of Mr. McDougall, and, to use their own expression, "to turn him back."⁸

Oscar Malmros, the local American Consul, had predicted something of the kind a month and a half earlier. Writing to the State Department on 11 September, Malmros had said the Settlers were politically unsophisticated and lacked the "political vitality" needed to sustain an insurrection, but that still most of them were inclined to expel the new governor on his arrival in October.⁹

On 19 October, soon after Riel and the Catholic clergy had raised support from the boatmen and the buffalo hunters who had returned in mid-October from the fall hunt, a

⁷Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874, pp. 9-10, Taché testimony.

⁸United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 187, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 2 Nov 1869.

⁹United States: Consular Dispatches from Winnipeg, Oscar Malmros to J. C. B. Davis, 11 Sep 1869.

"National Committee" was formed to direct the force. President of the Committee was John Bruce, but he was merely a figurehead for the Secretary, Riel. The National Committee's only clearly formulated aim seemed to be to prevent the entry into the Settlement of William McDougall and his sitting quietly there until the transfer put him in power. To forestall his even approaching the Settlement they sent a messenger to Pembina to tell McDougall to stay out of the territory until he received permission from the National Committee to enter.

The Canadians in the Settlement, like Mactavish and the English, were caught off guard. Some suggested an attack on the Métis barricade, but Dennis vetoed the idea.¹⁰ He and most of the Canadians realized that the rest of the Settlement--the Métis, the Company, and the English-speaking Settlers--were either against them or at least unsympathetic to the Canadian cause. In the end, they did nothing but talk, complaining of the inactivity of the Company and English Settlers and protesting to Mactavish, who was already doing all he could.

Mactavish first learned of the Métis road block at the River Sale (La Salle) through a deposition submitted by

¹⁰P.A.M., J. H. Storer, Rebellion, an Account of P. G. Laurie's Experiences During the Red River Disturbances, p. 7.

a Walter Hyman and notarized by Dr. Cowan.¹¹ Cowan notified Mactavish that same afternoon, Friday, 22 October, and Mactavish immediately called for a meeting of the Council for the following Monday.¹²

In the illness of Mactavish, Black presided at the meeting of 25 October.¹³ The Council unanimously condemned the Métis road block, but:

. . . feeling strongly impressed with the idea that the parties concerned in them must be acting in utter forgetfulness or even perhaps ignorance of the highly criminal character of their actions, and of the very serious consequences they involved; it was thought that by calm reasoning and advice, they might be induced, to abandon their dangerous schemes, before they had irretrievably committed themselves.¹⁴

The Council had previously invited two of the Métis leaders, John Bruce and Louis Riel, to attend, and they were called on to explain the motives and intentions of their party.¹⁵ Riel alone addressed the Council. He had come prepared with a list of twelve points,¹⁶ and in the course of a "long and

¹¹Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874, p. 127, Cowan testimony; Ibid., p. 127, Hyman deposition, dated 22 Oct 1869.

¹²Ibid., p. 127, Cowan testimony.

¹³P.A.M., Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 25 Oct 1869.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶de Tremaudan, Histoire de la Nation Métisse, pp. 173-75.

somewhat irregular discussion,"¹⁷ he said the Métis were "perfectly satisfied with the present Government and wanted no other." The Métis, he said, objected to any Government being sent from Canada without delegates having previously been sent to negotiate the terms under which they would acknowledge the new government. Riel went on to say that the Métis were:

. . . uneducated and only half civilized and felt that if a large immigration were to take place they would probably be crowded out of a country which they claimed as their own; that they knew they were in a sense poor and insignificant, but, that it was just because they were aware of this, that they had felt so much at being treated as if they were even more insignificant than they in reality were¹⁸

They feared that McDougall, once in, would not be gotten out again, and their cause would be lost. He did not anticipate any opposition from the English-speaking part of the Settlement, Riel said, and he was prepared for any that might come from the Canadian Party. In any case, he went on, the Métis were determined to prevent McDougall's entry into the Settlement.

Nothing the Council said in any way changed Riel's attitude. He would agree only to convey to the Métis the Council's feelings on the matter and report the result to Mactavish by Thursday morning at 11 o'clock, and he was

¹⁷P.A.M., Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 25 Oct 1869.

¹⁸Ibid.

reluctant to do even that much.¹⁹

After Riel's and Bruce's departure, the Council members settled down to seeking a solution to the dilemma confronting them. They briefly considered calling out an armed force to meet and escort McDougall into the Settlement, but rejected this because, if one was forthcoming at all, it would be from the English-speaking part of the community. As they had so often in the past, they decided that it was wholly undesirable to oppose one section of the community with the other, not only because of the race, language, and religion aspects of such a clash, but also because of fear that hostilities between the two sections of the community would be joined in by the surrounding Indians.²⁰ The only dissenting Councillor in this decision was Archbishop Machray, who advocated raising a force and putting down the uprising.²¹

Learning that a number of the more intelligent and influential Métis were having nothing to do with the road block, the Council decided to send two Council members, William Dease and Roger Goulet, to gather these Métis

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Preliminary Investigation and Trial of Ambroise D. Lepine (Winnipeg, 1874), p. 51, Machray testimony.

together and go with them out to the River Sale to try to persuade the Métis there to disperse.²² Dease apparently managed to raise about eighty anti-Riel French, and they met with the insurgents on 27 October.²³ Two of the area's leading Catholic clergy were at the meeting, N. J. Ritchot and J.-M. Lestanc; the latter was the administrator of the St. Boniface Diocese in Taché's absence. Lestanc apparently took no stand during the proceedings, but Ritchot advised the Métis to hold their ground.²⁴ A member of the Dease party reported that one of the priests, apparently Ritchot, "raved and tore his gown while addressing the assemblage in a most frantic and excited manner."²⁵ On noting this, some twenty of the Dease party defected then and there. The meeting, in short, tended to solidify rather than disperse the Métis.

Dease returned with a suggestion that Mactavish provide guns and ammunition for his party to escort McDougall in by another route.²⁶ He said that judging by the comments

²²P.A.M., Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 25 Oct 1869.

²³Canada: Correspondence and Papers Connected with Recent Occurrences in the North-West Territories, p. 12, note by Dennis dated 27 Oct 1869.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

of some of the insurgents, "it would not be a matter of much regret to them . . . were the Governor to find his way into the settlement by another route."²⁷ The insurgent leaders, he went on, had implied that "they would feel it a relief rather than otherwise, owing to the evident division among the French elements." Mactavish,

who was very feeble, and is evidently feeling the responsibility and delicacy of his position, determined to consider the matter tonight, and call in the aid of some Members of the Council to-morrow morning, and decide what course was best to be pursued.²⁸

The scheme was rejected, but Dease had brought another proposition back with him. He told Black that the insurgent party suggested to him that they would let McDougall in now if the rest of the Settlement would agree to help expel him later if he failed to meet their demands. Black dismissed the idea.²⁹

On the day following the Council meeting, Mactavish, on being told that the real leader of the Métis manning the road block was Ritchot,³⁰ addressed a letter to the priest.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 18, note by Dennis dated 28 Oct 1869.

³⁰Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874, p. 128, Cowan testimony.

Reverend Sir,--I hope you will excuse me for troubling you on the following subject, the more especially as you may already have endeavored without success to persuade the men now on the road near la Rivière Sale, for the purpose of preventing the Honorable Wm. McDougall from coming on into the settlement, to return peaceably to their homes, and give up the idea of forcibly stopping Mr. McDougall on the highway. But even if you have already done so, I would still beg you to make another attempt to endeavor by your influence to lead the men in question to reconsider their first intentions, and to abandon them, convinced as I am that they are acting in opposition to their interests, though I confess I have failed utterly in my attempts to make them see their actions in this light.

I am very desirous you should see the men, if you consider it proper, as soon as possible, as the Council yesterday appointed Mr. W. Dease, with some others, to see the men who are now watching the road to Pembina, in the hope that they might be induced to disperse; but I confess I have so little hope in Mr. Dease's success, that I prefer the risk of inconveniencing you, in the hope that by your efforts beforehand, Mr. Dease's meeting with the other party may be unnecessary. In the hope that the desire for the peace and welfare of the Settlement may be my excuse, with much respect³¹

Ritchot responded by coming to see Mactavish on Thursday, 28 October. There ensued a "warm discussion" of some three hours, at the end of which Mactavish had failed to bring Ritchot around to his point of view.³² Still, Mactavish came away from the meeting feeling that Ritchot would try to help restore law and order.³³ Ritchot, however,

³¹Ibid., p. 100, Mactavish to N. J. Ritchot, 26 Oct 1869.

³²United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 18, note by Dennis dated 28 Oct 1869.

³³Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874, p. 128, Cowan testimony.

merely returned to exhorting the Métis to stand their ground, adding new force to his argument by telling them that Mactavish was on their side.³⁴

Riel had made his report to Mactavish on the same day, and Dugas provided an account of the ensuing conversation:

Celui-ci le reçut avec beaucoup de politesse lorsqu'il se présenta; il lui dit qu'il était bien aise de voir arriver, dans la colonie, un jeune homme capable d'y rendre des services, par la haute éducation qu'il avait reçue. "J'ai bien connu M. votre père lui dit-il; c'était un homme sage et habile." Je suis heureux, répondit Riel, de savoir que vous avez gardé de mon père ce bon souvenir, et je vous remercie pour les paroles élogieuses que vous m'en dites; je tâcherais de l'imiter et de me rendre, comme lui, utile à mon pays, d'autant plus que les circonstances actuelles semblent m'en fournir l'occasion.

--Je crois, lui dit le gouverneur (amené ainsi à la question), que vos compatriotes ont tort de s'inquiéter outre mesure et de menacer le gouvernement canadien d'une insurrection pour l'empêcher de s'établir ici. Ne vaudrait-il pas mieux, pur eux, attendre en paix que le gouvernement fasse ici ses preuves? il sera toujours temps d'adresser des plaintes à Ottawa.

--Excellence, lui dit Riel, ce ne sont pas les métis qui sont actuellement blâmables. Je n'ai pas le temps de voir, ce soir, jusqu'où vont les responsabilités dans le désordre qui règne en ce moment; mais voici ce que je tiens à vous dire. Les colons anglais ne comprennent rien à la situation; ils semblent tout-à-fait indifférents à la question qui se pose aujourd'hui. Ils seraient prêts à laisser s'établir ici le gouvernement canadien, quitte à lui poser plus tard des conditions, si les affaires vont mal; or, telle n'est pas notre manière, à nous, de procéder. Il est, ce me semble, de la prudence la plus élémentaire d'empêcher la loup

³⁴Ibid.

d'entrer dans la bergerie; vu qu'il est toujours plus facile de le tenir dehors que de le mettre à la porte lorsqu'il est entré. Pour nous, le gouvernement canadien, tel qu'il se présente, c'est le loup, et nous sommes bien déterminés à l'empêcher d'entrer chez nous où il n'a aucun droit. Nous restons loyaux sujets de Sa Majesté, mais nous refusons net de reconnaître, ici, l'autorité du Canada.³⁵

The next day, 29 October, two more members of the Council of Assiniboia were sent down to the River Sale to talk to the Métis.³⁶ They spoke first with Ritchot, who told them there was no chance that the leaders of the movement would back down. Finally gaining entry to a room containing ten of the leading Métis, they had difficulty getting a hearing, and when they did get one they changed no one's mind. They came away, however, as Dease had earlier, with the probably erroneous conviction that if McDougall were brought in by another route the Métis would not attempt to block him.³⁷

That evening, Father Lestanc visited Mactavish at the Fort and, the river being difficult to cross because ice was forming, remained all night with the Governor. When he left the next morning, he promised Mactavish that he would exert

³⁵Georges Dugas, Le Mouvement des Métis (Montreal, 1909), pp. 44-46; English translation in Appendix J.

³⁶United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, pp. 18-19, note by Dennis dated 29 Oct 1869.

³⁷Ibid.

all the influence of his position to putting a stop to the disturbance.³⁸ The following evening, however, he returned with the news that his efforts had been to no avail.³⁹

By 30 October, also, other personal efforts of Mactavish had failed. A Pierre Poitras, writing in 1872 in answer to a question sent by Riel, said:

You ask what William McTavish said to me on the occasion about which I spoke; he said: "I count on you as one of my friends; return home quietly;" I said I could not abandon the affair; that the Métis had the right to ask some arrangement with Canada; he replied: "Yes you have the right but I fear you will not succeed."⁴⁰

Mactavish in his discussions with the Métis leaders had taken the position that they were to some extent justified, but that their action (1) was unnecessary, and (2) would not succeed. He felt that the Canadian Government had badly mismanaged the transfer, and by thus giving rise to Métis anxieties about their future had justified their making some sort of opposition to the Canadian assumption of authority. But like the rest of the English-speaking Settlers, and many of the Métis, Mactavish felt that fears were needless--that the future Canadian administration would be considerably

³⁸United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 18, note by Dennis dated 30 Oct 1869.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰P.A.M ., Riel Papers, Pierre Poitras to Riel, 13 Feb 1872 (translation).

different from that pictured by the actions of the Canadian Party and the transfer preliminaries. But as Alexander Begg pointed out, Mactavish was in a decidedly peculiar position. The Canadians were accusing him of cooperating with the Métis, while the Métis suspected him of being in collusion with the Canadians. "Mactavish occupied a very trying position, especially as the English and Scotch settlers were inclined to stand altogether aloof in the matter."⁴¹

Having exhausted all possibility of removing the road block immediately, and faced with McDougall's approach, Mactavish was forced to write to McDougall at Pembina explaining the situation and advising him to wait in Pembina while he and the Council tried to get the Métis to disperse.⁴²

But by then Riel had other plans on foot. The road block had been working well; McDougall had not seen fit to test it himself but two of his officers had done so and found it unassailable. Still, Riel was not satisfied. Winter was coming on, and he needed both shelter and provisions for his men, now totaling over four hundred, if he was to sustain

⁴¹Begg, History of North-West, I, p. 398.

⁴²United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, pp. 16-18, Mactavish to McDougall, Fort Garry, 30 Oct 1869; see Appendix I for reproduction of letter.

the uprising much longer.⁴³ He may have feared that the Canadians might capture Fort Garry. Mactavish thought Riel was afraid McDougall might be brought into the Settlement by a roundabout route and enthroned in the fort, surrounded by "loyal" Canadians. Perhaps, as W. L. Morton pointed out, Riel did not want to lose the initiative by merely continuing to lie passively between McDougall and the Settlement.⁴⁴ And then an uprising of four hundred men devoted merely to blocking a road against a party of twenty people would tend to breed within itself a dynamic energy pressing for wider horizons, greater goals. And as his force had grown, Riel's cautious but lively longing for glory had flowered along with it. More and more he bent his glance on Fort Garry. Capturing it would be a magnificent stroke.

The problem lay in persuading the other leading Métis that capturing it was necessary. The National Committee apparently had no desire to disturb existing authority, their only aim being to keep McDougall out. Riel's oratory stood him in good stead, however, and the Committee finally agreed to the move on 1 November.⁴⁵

It was the only obstacle confronting Riel, since

⁴³Stanley, Louis Riel, pp. 66-67.

⁴⁴Begg's Journal, Intro. by Morton, pp. 55-58.

⁴⁵Begg, Creation of Manitoba, p. 74.

capturing the fort presented no problem at all. Used merely as a place of business, Fort Garry had no guard during the day, just a watchman at night, and a force of about 120 Métis moved in with no difficulty whatever.⁴⁶ Georges Dugas gave the usual version of the taking of the bastion: about three o'clock in the afternoon armed Métis in groups of four or five climbed up the river bank and entered the fort as if they were nothing more than simple hunters from the prairie, exciting no suspicion until most of them were inside.⁴⁷ There is some suggestion, though, that the move on the fort was more en masse:

While the detachment was on its way to the Fort, wild rumours were spread abroad as to the designs of the approaching party. One of these rumours was to the effect that a party was to be despatched to fire the store of Dr. Schultz, and take the Doctor and Dr. Bown, proprietor of the "Nor-Wester" prisoners.⁴⁸

Cowan was away from the fort at the time, and Mactavish was confined to his bed.⁴⁹ On returning to the fort soon after the Métis had occupied it, Cowan:

⁴⁶Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874,
p. 124, Bannatyne testimony.

⁴⁷Dugas, Le Mouvement de Métis, p. 68.

⁴⁸United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 27, Extracts from Private Correspondence, Fort Garry, 6 Nov 1869.

⁴⁹United States: Letters received by State Department from Agent for Red River Affairs, J. W. Taylor to Hamilton Fish, St. Paul, 20 Jan 1870.

. . . saw about twenty armed men apparently leaving from the inside the back gate of the fort, which was always kept locked. This was the entrance from the Governor's premises, which were usually kept private. I spoke to them, enquiring of them what they were doing there, and they said they were ordered to guard that gate by their superiors, and that Riel was in the Fort wanting to see me. I saw him, and he told me he was very sorry that it was forced upon him to come into Fort Garry, that they respected the Company's property, and that nothing would be touched, and no one would be injured, and that they would not remain longer than two or three days. I told him to withdraw his men immediately and he said he was very sorry he could not do that. He said he had 120 men. I had about fifteen including the Governor. I told him he had taken forcible possession, and he would be responsible for it. Riel wished to see the Governor, but he was too ill. He, however, sent him a message by me to withdraw at once from the Fort. Governor McTavish and I had before this considered the possibility of defending the Fort, and we had decided we could not get a sufficient force to do so, those who were best affected to the Company being then in insurrection.⁵⁰

Cowan in a diary entry of 2 November said that when Mactavish learned of Riel's taking over the fort he was "very much annoyed," but "saw he could do nothing."⁵¹

But what had Riel captured? Certainly nothing too impressive from a military point of view.⁵² George B. Elliot, writing in 1874, described it as a "harmless old stockade . . . hoary and venerable looking . . . and the bastions or towers look as if they seriously contemplated

⁵⁰Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874,
p. 128, Cowan testimony.

⁵¹P.A.C., Cowan Diary, 2 Nov 1869.

⁵²See Appendix H for discussion of Fort Garry.

falling over, or tumbling into pieces, from old age."⁵³ Its walls, Elliot went on, offered "but slight protection against rifles and howitzers, bombs, and other convincing projectiles."⁵⁴

But no one around had any "howitzers, bombs, and other convincing projectiles," and if Fort Garry was not an impressive fort it was considerably better under the circumstances than no fort at all. It may not have impressed a regular military force, but Riel had no need to impress a regular military force, just local citizens, and they were to remain impressed throughout the uprising. In addition, it provided an excellent rallying point for the Métis, and was probably the only thing that enabled Riel to keep his force from fading away once the novelty of insurrection had worn off nearly everyone but himself. Furthermore, the fort contained large quantities of rifles, guns, ammunition, and, what was more important, stores of provisions.

In short, Riel had captured the means to sustain his rebellion. Without it, the rebellion would almost surely have been a short-lived thing. For this reason, the ease with which the fort fell stimulated a good deal of discussion then

⁵³George B. Elliot, Winnipeg as it is in 1874 (Winnipeg, 1874), p. 6.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 3.

and later. Isaac Cowie, stationed at Fort Qu'Appelle at the time, said he felt disgraced.⁵⁵ Others were indignant to the point of inaccuracy:

Will Canada believe, after the apparently good faith Governor McTavish showed when there, relative to the transfer of this country. When Riel's army was seen marching down to occupy Fort Garry their object was suspected, and the clerks begged permission to shut the gates, but it was promptly refused by Dr. Cowan under the orders from their chief.⁵⁶

And:

The Hudson's Bay Company officials, I believe, knew the people were rising, and they took no steps to put them down. They also knew that Riel and others were coming to take the fort, and they did not close the gates. They also refused the assistance of persons willing to assist in opposing his entrance.⁵⁷

The general drift of the accusations was that Mactavish could easily have stamped out the Rebellion had he not voluntarily given up the fort, which he could easily have defended: ". . . he could have called in to protect the Fort a number of constables, amply sufficient to repel all attempts against it."⁵⁸ Furthermore, the argument went, Mactavish and the other Hudson's Bay Company officers were

⁵⁵Cowie, Company of Adventurers, p. 396.

⁵⁶Begg's Journal, pp. 495-96, letter from Red River Loyalist reprinted in Toronto Globe of 28 Mar 1870.

⁵⁷Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874, p. 114, Bown testimony.

⁵⁸Lepine Trial, p. 55, Alexander Murray evidence.

warned beforehand of the Métis plans to take the fort.⁵⁹ Three warning devices were mentioned, one of which was the affidavit made by Walter Hyman to Dr. Cowan on 22 October conveying the news that the Métis had set up a road block on the road to Pembina. The second warning device was supposedly a pensioner named James Mulligan. A third was another pensioner named Michael Power. The argument was summed up by William McDougall:

. . . I have the positive assurance of Major Wallace, who has just returned from Fort Garry, as well as the statements of the "friends of Canada," that the Company's Officers in charge of Fort Garry were told of the intention of the Rebels to take the Fort the day before it occurred, and that Chief Constable Mulligan, who is an old soldier, offered to raise a force partly composed of "pensioners," with which he declared he could hold the Fort against all the Rebels who would be likely to attack it, but he was told by Dr. Cowan, the Officer in charge, that his services were not wanted.⁶⁰

But the Hyman deposition made no mention of Fort Garry, confining itself merely to describing the road block at the River Sale.⁶¹ And Mulligan and Power gave no warning, though after the fort had been taken, they offered to

⁵⁹United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 48, Notes by J. W. between 4 and 22 Nov 1869; Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874, p. 114, Bown testimony; P.A.M., Storer, Rebellion, p. 8.

⁶⁰United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 37, McDougall to Howe, Pembina, 20 Nov 1869.

⁶¹Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874, p. 127, Hyman Deposition, 22 Oct 1869.

raise a force of Pensioners to eject the Métis from it. The fact that the two Pensioners did not give a warning was attested to by Cowan, Black, and Mactavish himself.⁶² Furthermore, one of the men, Power, admitted that he gave no warning, and that his offer was made after the fall of the fort.⁶³ Of the affair, Mactavish said later:

Mulligan did not advise Dr. Cowan of the intended seizure of Fort Garry the day before it occurred; but, some time after it had taken place, he, and another old pensioner named Meichael /sic/ Power called on the Doctor and offered to expel the French. On being asked what force he would require to effect his object, Mulligan was silent, but Power replied "One man to raise the British Flag," "and another to stand below and defend it." The ridiculous offer was forthwith declined. Mr. Macdougall's /sic/ informant has probably picked up some garbled or bombastic account of this incident. Both Mulligan and Power have been among the prisoners detained for long periods by the French during the past winter. I may mention incidentally that their method of assault was actually attempted by a third old pensioner, /Master Sergeant/ Rickards of the Royal Marines, who has, for a number of years past acted as the night Watchman of the Fort. This hero, being somewhat under the influence of liquor, one morning, for a wager, made an attempt to raise the flag, which was instantly lowered among demonstrations disrespectful to it and its defender: I rather wonder the Major /Wallace/ has omitted this incident.

The corps of Pensioners referred to was the remnant of a considerable force sent from England in 1848. Even at that date they were not very respectfully spoken of as a military body. After having been enrolled for seven years they were disbanded in 1855. Many of them left the

⁶²Stanley, Louis Riel, p. 385n; A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letter from Mactavish to Howe, Fort Garry, 14 May 1870.

⁶³Stanley, Louis Riel, p. 385n.

country, others remained as settlers here, and their numbers were slightly increased by men retiring from service in the force of Royal Canadian Rifles stationed here between 1857 and 1861. There are at present twenty six of them. They are absolutely inefficient in a military point of view. Most of them are old, worn out men, and those among them who are otherwise have already publicly and repeatedly refused to acknowledge the Company's right to command them to take up arms during civil disturbances.

To return to the merits of the chief [illegible] under reply, I have to deny that Dr. Cowan or myself had any reason to entertain suspicion of a seizure of Fort Garry previous to its occurrence; but even had we possessed such, we were powerless to prevent it.⁶⁴

So, though Mactavish had not been warned that the Métis were going to take the fort, he would not have tried to defend it even if he had been warned. Taché described the situation that Mactavish faced:

I do not know whether there was a sufficient number of the so-called Canadian party in the vicinity of the Fort to have defended it, had they been called on, and had they responded to such a call. The only persons who I conceive would be called on by the Company in the emergency were the old pensioners, twenty or thirty in number, of whom many were aged and invalids and who were scattered through the country and not concentrated near the fort. My notion is this, that for many years previous to this time the Canadian party had shown themselves hostile to the Company; had insulted the Government and had so conducted themselves as to render it almost impossible for the Government to rely on them or call on them for assistance. The Government believed that they [the Métis] intended nothing against the Queen's authority, and therefore had no idea that they intended attacking the fort, and was taken by surprise at the taking of the fort. I think that the old resident Scotch and English half-breeds would not have answered the call of the Company.⁶⁵

⁶⁴A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letter from Mactavish to Howe, Fort Garry, 14 May, 1870

⁶⁵Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874, p. 13, Taché testimony.

This was part of the problem--the continued apathy of the English-speaking Settlers, both to the transfer and to the Métis uprising. Their position was that they had not asked to be taken over by Canada, they had not been consulted in the transfer, and they did not propose to risk their homes, lives, and old-time friendships by opposing Riel and the Métis with force.⁶⁶ They felt that the road block was Canada's problem, and one she would have to solve herself. They "looked upon the quarrel as not theirs to settle."⁶⁷

When you present to us the issue of a conflict with the French party, with whom we have hitherto lived in friendship . . . we feel disinclined to enter upon it, and think that the Dominion should assume the responsibility of establishing amongst us what it, and it alone, has decided upon.⁶⁸

As an English half-breed named Tait put it later in November:

"You may talk; but in that Convention we sit opposite to those who have been born and brought up among us, eat with us, slept with us, hunted with us, traded with us, and are of our own flesh and blood. Gentlemen," said he, "I for one cannot fight them. I will not imbue my hands in their blood."⁶⁹

⁶⁶Hopkins, Story of our Country, p. 363.

⁶⁷MacBeth, Making of the Canadian West, p. 48.

⁶⁸Stanley, Birth of Western Canada, p. 62.

⁶⁹United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 49, Notes by J. W. between 4 and 22 Nov 1869.

And the probability was that the Scotch Settlers of Kildonan would have felt a great deal the same way:

The children of the French-speaking families and the rest of us were the best of friends and companions. It seems a needless thing for me to say that, because the relations between the French-speaking families and the rest of us in Red River were always of friendliness and good will. In the very earliest and hardest days of the settlement that friendship was established upon a lasting foundation by the French-Canadians and the Métis who showed warmhearted kindness to the poor Scottish people when the lack of food at the Forks compelled them to go down to the buffalo hunters' headquarters at the mouth of the Pembina river in the winter time.⁷⁰

On top of this, there was a tendency during the early stages of the Rebellion to treat the affair lightly. "At first the English and the Scottish were disposed to notice mainly what was ridiculous and absurd in the proceedings of Riel."⁷¹ Even after the taking of the fort, most thought that Riel and his confederates were not likely to do anything much worse than spend a comfortable winter in Fort Garry at the expense of the Company. Even John Schultz apparently ridiculed the idea of the matter becoming serious.⁷² As far as the English were concerned, the situation was far from desperate, and a call from Mactavish to rise and defend the fort would for several reasons have received little response.

⁷⁰Healy, Women of Red River, p. 88.

⁷¹Garrioch, Correction Line, p. 312.

⁷²p.A.M., Storer, Rebellion, p. 6.

It was not their affair, it was not very serious, anyway, and it would have been their numerous, well-armed, and formidable friends and neighbors they would have been defending it against.

Besides, Mactavish's policy was still to avoid setting one part of the population against the other, and it was one supported both by the Council and by others in the Settlement. Alexander Begg said: "A collision between the French and English settlers is to be dreaded as no one can tell where that would end."⁷³ Part of the fear was that, if pressed, the Métis would call upon Indian allies, a fear "shown to have been reasonable by the fact that such aid was invoked and obtained with terrible effect under much less favorable circumstances, and against heavier odds, by practically the same parties, some fifteen years later, in the second rebellion."⁷⁴

So Fort Garry fell without a shot being fired. Perhaps the Métis counted on continued indifference from the English-speaking Settlers; in any case, they would probably have carried out the plan anyway, feeling, rightly so, that they were more than a match for any possible opposition in the vicinity. Their taking of Fort Garry did cost them some popular support temporarily, particularly after they took complete

⁷³Begg's Journal, p. 163.

⁷⁴MacBeth, Making of the Canadian West, p. 50.

control of the fort on 23 November and seized the official books and records of the Settlement.⁷⁵ But in taking the fort they brought virtually to an end the flaccid rule of the government of Assiniboia, and thus paved the way for their own Provisional Government.

⁷⁵Begg, Creation of Manitoba, p. 96.

CHAPTER X

WILLIAM MCDOUGALL

Meanwhile, over the plains from the end of the railway at St. Paul had crept the caravan of Lieutenant-Governor-designate William McDougall. He was apparently later than he might have been, having "waited to air his honours through Ontario."¹ Joseph Howe described him as coming "as a great satrap paying a visit to a province, with an amount of following, a grandeur of equipage, a display of pomp that was enough to tempt the cupidity of all the half breeds in the country. He aimed to establish a paternal despotism."² Actually, McDougall's party, including Canadians who joined it along the way, numbered according to McDougall only twenty.³ The caravan was swelled by a large amount of baggage, however, including three hundred Enfield rifles that the Canadian Government had sent along when it heard there might be trouble.

McDougall was a tall, "heavy-built man, with a

¹United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 78, article in Toronto Globe, 31 Dec 1869.

²Davidson, Louis Riel, p. 35.

³Canada: Correspondence and Papers Connected with the Recent Occurrences in the North-West Territories, p. 21, McDougall to Howe, Pembina, 5 Nov 1869.

drooping moustache and an air of authority about him."⁴ He had long been a subject of political controversy in Canada, and his appointment as the North-West Territory's first Lieutenant-Governor was in some ways a peculiar one. He brought with him a reputation for being anti-Hudson's Bay Company,⁵ anti-Catholic, and anti-French. In the vacuum created by lack of official information from the Canadian Government, a rumor also gained credence that he brought with him a complete, ready-made council composed of men who had never seen the North-West.⁶ And, as pointed out earlier, he had already achieved a certain notoriety in the Settlement through his connection with the road building project.

There was a difference of opinion between the Toronto Globe and McDougall as to why he had been appointed. McDougall said it was because he had once been an Indian agent and therefore possessed considerable knowledge of the character and manners of Indians.⁷ The Globe said that McDougall, enthusiastically disliked by the members of his

⁴United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 80, article from St. Paul Despatch, 31 Dec 1869; Stanley, Louis Riel, p. 60.

⁵Willson, Life of Lord Strathcona, p. 156.

⁶Davidson, Louis Riel, p. 28.

⁷A.H.B.C., A.12/45, St. Paul Daily /illegible/, 21 Dec 1869.

own party (Conservative) in Parliament and in the Cabinet, had been given the job to get him out of the way.⁸ Though there might have been some truth in the Globe's allegations, more likely the main reason was that McDougall had fought long and hard, if somewhat unscrupulously, against the rights of the Hudson's Bay Company to the North-West and for the area's annexation to Canada, and had therefore earned some of the spoils.

In any case, McDougall brought with him three commissions, one of which was for Mactavish and other parties named in it to administer to McDougall the oaths of allegiance and of office.⁹ McDougall also carried a letter directing him to place himself in communication with Mactavish as soon as he arrived, to notify Mactavish of his appointment, and offer Mactavish, and John Black or another high judicial officer of the Company, seats in his council.¹⁰ McDougall was also to specify Company officers in the area that he thought should be retained in the territorial government.¹¹

⁸United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Occurrences in Red River, p. 78, article in Toronto Globe, 31 Dec 1869.

⁹Canada: Correspondence and Papers Connected with the Recent Occurrences in the North-West Territories, p. 3, E. A. Meredith to McDougall, Ottawa, 11 Oct 1869.

¹⁰Ibid., E. A. Meredith to McDougall, Ottawa, 28 Sep 1869.

¹¹Ibid.

As his caravan inched its way across western Minnesota in the teeth of a storm, McDougall met Joseph Howe returning to Canada from his short visit to the Settlement. Because of the storm, perhaps, the two men stopped to talk only briefly before proceeding on their way. Howe apparently told McDougall nothing of the situation at Red River during their meeting, but on reaching St. Paul he wrote McDougall a letter outlining the state of matters in the Settlement. All Howe was aware of was that the Métis had stopped the surveys. James Wickes Taylor also encountered McDougall along the way and reported that though McDougall had heard of unrest in the Settlement he felt confident of his ability to satisfy the malcontents.¹² John H. O'Donnell, who also travelled with the McDougall party part way, also reported that McDougall was confident of being able to handle any trouble that arose.¹³

The "amount of following", the "grandeur of equipage", and the "display of pomp" all ground to a halt at Pembina, Dakota Territory, on the threshold of McDougall's new dominion. Mactavish earlier had planned to meet McDougall at Pembina and escort him into the Settlement, but was prevented

¹²P.A.M., Taylor Papers, draft of letter from Taylor to Hamilton Fish, Washington, 20 Jan 1870.

¹³O'Donnell, Manitoba as I saw it, p. 14.

from doing so by the state of his health.¹⁴ Instead, McDougall was met by the note signed by Bruce and Riel ordering him to stay out of the territory unless he received special permission from the Committee to enter.¹⁵ McDougall immediately sent a note of his own to Mactavish announcing his arrival within Mactavish's jurisdiction and demanding his protection.¹⁶

Soon after McDougall's arrival at Pembina he received a long letter signed by Mactavish but drawn up by Black at a meeting of the Council of Assiniboia on 29 October.¹⁷ The letter told McDougall of the recent rise of discontent in the Settlement, of the stopping of the surveys, and of the vain efforts of the local authorities to solve the difficulty. It went on to outline three possible courses of

¹⁴Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874, p. 185, Hargrave testimony.

¹⁵Stanley, Birth of Western Canada, p. 43; the note apparently had been drawn up on 21 October at the home of John Bruce; Garrioch, Correction Line, pp. 298-99.

¹⁶Canada: Correspondence and Papers Connected with the Recent Occurrences in the North-West Territories, p. 6, McDougall to Howe, Pembina, NWT, 31 Oct 1869.

¹⁷United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, pp. 187-88, Mactavish to McDougall, Fort Garry, 30 Oct 1869; as will be seen later, Black apparently wrote most if not all of the Mactavish correspondence to McDougall during this period. Mactavish, however, seems to have written his own reports to the Company during this time; this letter can be found in Appendix I.

action: (1) escort McDougall into the Settlement by a round-about route with a group of twenty or thirty well-disposed Métis; (a) make a general public call on the Settlement at large and try to get three hundred unarmed able-bodied men to escort McDougall in by the usual route; (3) have McDougall remain at Pembina until the authorities had a chance to talk the malcontents into dispersing to their homes. The first solution, the letter went on, was unsatisfactory. Such a small body of men was too small to protect McDougall but large enough to provoke a collision. Furthermore, by avoiding the Métis at the road block, they would be acknowledging their power, which would only encourage them. The second course was also unsatisfactory, the letter continued, not only because there was doubt that such a force could be raised but also because of the attendant danger of plunging the Settlement into a "war of race and religion." The letter concluded that McDougall should in the opinion of Mactavish and the Council remain at Pembina until the situation improved.

McDougall in his reply agreed to wait a few days at Pembina. He further pointed out that he would not take over the territory until 1 December, and until that time Mactavish was in charge and responsible for putting down any lawlessness.¹⁸ He then started what became a series of requests, or

¹⁸Ibid., p. 21, McDougall to Mactavish, Pembina, 2 Nov 1869.

demands, on Mactavish to issue a proclamation regarding the transfer of territory. McDougall specified that Mactavish's proclamation should explain the provisions of the Imperial Act regarding the Territory, outline the authority under which the new government would rule, and warn the malcontents of the seriousness of their actions.¹⁹

Mactavish, or Black, answered McDougall's request for a proclamation by saying that he and the Council of Assiniboia had received no official notification from England or Canada of the transfer, of the date it would take effect, or of the conditions provided.²⁰ The only information they had received had come from "semi-official sources" (The Hudson's Bay Company):

In such a state of matters we think it is evident that any such action on the part of the Red River Authorities as that to which you point would necessarily have been marked by a great degree of vagueness and uncertainty; it was felt that it might affect injuriously the future as well as the present Government, and we therefore deemed it advisable to await the receipt of official intelligence of the actual transfer of the country, and of all the details which it concerned us to know.²¹

The letter went on to say that they had nevertheless attempted to present the transfer to the Settlers in a good light, and

¹⁹Ibid., p. 21, McDougall to Mactavish, Pembina, 2 Nov 1869.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 37-39, Mactavish to McDougall, Fort Garry, 9 Nov 1869.

²¹Ibid.

had done all they could to impress on the malcontents the "illegality and danger of the course upon which they had entered" They had not taken any positive coercive measures, the letter continued, because they had no reliable force to insure success. Mactavish in May 1870 gave further reasons for not wanting to issue a proclamation:

The men to whom the Proclamation would be addressed do not understand English and cannot read any language at all. The most gross misrepresentations might have been made to them concerning the contents of the paper, without the slightest risk of the fraud being detected²²

And almost ten years before, in answer to a recommendation by the Company that Mactavish issue a proclamation on another matter, Mactavish gave his opinion on issuing pointless proclamations in the Settlement: "as a general rule I would strongly recommend the Company to be chary in issuing public notices here until there is a necessity for them, or an object to be gained by them."²³

Mactavish and John Black continued to feel that a proclamation would do no good whatsoever, and that if anything could be done with the Métis it would only be by persuasion.²⁴ McDougall, however, persisted in pressing for one, and

²²A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letter from Mactavish to Howe, Fort Garry, 14 May 1870.

²³A.H.B.C., A.12/42, Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 3 Dec 1861.

²⁴Begg, Creation of Manitoba, pp. 73-74.

Mactavish finally relented. Black helped him draft it.²⁵ The draft copy was turned over to Mactavish's secretary, J. J. Hargrave, for copying into final form and for presenting to the Convention of English and French delegates meeting on 16 November. Soon after, Mactavish received a "round-robin" letter (signed in such a way that no signature appears more prominent than any of the others) from a group of Canadians in the Settlement demanding that Mactavish issue a proclamation.²⁶ Mactavish replied, saying he had already drawn up a proclamation and that it would be presented at the Convention.²⁷

Hargrave handed the proclamation in to the Convention between twelve and one o'clock on 16 November,²⁸ giving it to Henry McKenney and asking him to read it before the members present.²⁹ Riel refused to allow it to be read.³⁰ After a good deal of argument between the English and French members of the Convention, a compromise was reached with all parties agreeing that it would be read toward the close of

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Begg, Creation of Manitoba, pp. 59-60, 60-61.

²⁷Ibid., p. 64.

²⁸Ibid., p. 71

²⁹Ibid., pp. 65-66.

³⁰Begg's Journal, Intro. by Morton, pp. 60-61.

the meeting.³¹ When read near the end of the meeting, the proclamation was found to denounce as illegal the road block, the detaining of passengers and the seizure of cargo on the road, the occupation of Fort Garry, and the resistance to the transfer.³² It ended with the statement:

You are dealing with a crisis out of which may come incalculable good or immeasurable evil and with all the weight of my official authority and all the influence of my individual position let me finally charge you to adopt only such means as are lawful and constitutional rational and safe.³³

James Ross, former editor of the Nor'-Wester, immediately took the position that no further debate was necessary, and that if the Métis continued in their present course, they would be in a state of rebellion.³⁴ Riel replied with a long-winded dissertation on what they were fighting for, then, somewhat desperate because of signs that many of his Métis followers tended to agree with Ross, said:

"See what Mr. Mactavish says, he says that out of this meeting and its decision may come incalculable good. Let us unite. The evil that he fears will not take place. See how he speaks. Is it surprising? His children are half-breeds like ourselves.'³⁵

³¹Begg, Creation of Manitoba, pp. 65-66.

³²Begg's Journal, pp. 167-69; for entire proclamation see Appendix K.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Begg's Journal, Intro. by Morton, pp. 60-61.

³⁵Stanley, Louis Riel, p. 69.

Riel's distortion succeeded in keeping the Métis behind him, and Mactavish's reluctant proclamation fell lifeless.

Still, it was published by two local newspapers. On the evening of 16 November, Mactavish had sent a copy of his proclamation to the office of the short-lived Red River Pioneer, William Coldwell, editor, with instructions to print and circulate a number of copies of it among the people.³⁶ As the proof sheet was being struck off the next day, however, a gentleman named Charles Garrett, who happened to be standing nearby, grabbed it and ran off to the Nor'-Wester office.³⁷ The Nor'-Wester soon got out an "extra" containing their demand that Mactavish produce a proclamation followed by the proclamation itself minus the fifth clause.³⁸ The Nor'-Wester, ignoring the explanation Mactavish had previously given them, stated that Mactavish had issued the proclamation as a direct result of their demand for one.³⁹ Alexander Begg described Bown's delivery of the special edition:

It was really amusing to see the little editor of the "Nor'-Wester" hopping about from door to door on the evening of the 17th November, distributing the "extras"

³⁶Begg's Journal, p. 170.

³⁷Begg, Creation of Manitoba, p. 70.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 59, 70.

³⁹Begg's Journal, p. 170.

with his own hands. There, he roared, as he pitched in a few copies of his "Loyalty Triumphant" at one door, "See what we have done:" and at the next house, "We'll show you now, what we can do," and so on, in the same strain, from door to door. People smiled, and wondered if it was possible that there were many amongst the incoming Canadians like the little man who was then making such a fuss about nothing.⁴⁰

Coldwell and his Pioneer published its complete version of the proclamation on the 18th.⁴¹ In an accompanying article the Pioneer stated that the Nor'-Wester was incorrect in saying its demand had "drawn" the proclamation out of Mactavish. It pointed out that not only had Mactavish already decided to issue a proclamation, but that it had told the Nor'-Wester so.⁴² Unfortunately, this first and only issue of the Pioneer was not permitted to circulate in the Settlement.⁴³

The reaction to the proclamation was almost universally unfavorable. Lestanc said it indicated to the Metis that the Company was in collusion with the Canadian Government.⁴⁴ James Wickes Taylor said it was without effect.⁴⁵

⁴⁰Begg, Creation of Manitoba, p. 61.

⁴¹Begg's Journal, p. 172.

⁴²Begg, Creation of Manitoba, p. 127. ⁴³Ibid., p. 124

⁴⁴Adam Shortt and Arthur G. Doughty, Canada and its Provinces (Toronto, 1913-17), XI, p. 74.

⁴⁵United States: Letters Received by State Department from Agent for Red River Affairs, Taylor to Fish, St. Paul, 20 Jan 1870.

So did Mactavish.⁴⁶ The Canadian Party, concerned suddenly with morality, wrote to McDougall that "we have no faith in the sincerity of that proclamation."⁴⁷ Even the Nor'-Wester's early enthusiasm cooled, and in their last issue, that of 24 November, they complained that the proclamation contained many deliberate omissions.⁴⁸ Alexander Begg thought the proclamation's only effect was a harmful one:

Had no Proclamation been issued there is a great probability that some agreement would have been arrived at between the French and English, to treat with the Canadian Government, either through Mr. McDougall or direct; but as it was, neither side would give way, and the consequence was, the whole proceedings were unsatisfactory, and productive of no good.⁴⁹

If the proclamation did nothing else, however, it at least satisfied temporarily what Begg called McDougall's "mania" for proclamations.⁵⁰

Reporting the issuance of the proclamation to Joseph Howe, McDougall said that everyone had been telling him that the Company's employees were encouraging the insurrection, and that

⁴⁶A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letter from Mactavish to Howe, Fort Garry, 14 May 1870.

⁴⁷Begg, History of the North-West, I, p. 397.

⁴⁸Begg, Creation of Manitoba, pp. 98-99.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 77-78.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 63.

it was the prevalence of this belief that determined me to force the Authorities into a public declaration of some kind that would dispel this illusion, if such it should prove to be, or compel them to show their hand as abettors of the Insurrection. The "Appeal" of the loyal inhabitants . . . was the last screw applied, and seems to have accomplished the purpose . . .⁵¹

Mactavish, learning later of this letter, said:

In deference to Mr. Macdougall's repeated suggestions, I ultimately issued my Proclamation. While the document was still lying in "draft" form, I received a letter signed by thirty names, arranged in a circular form, commonly known I believe as a "Round Robin," demanding the issue of such a manifesto as I had in contemplation. On the issue of the Proclamation the "Nor-Wester" newspaper published it, along with a transcript of the letter above mentioned, which had, I understand, been concocted in its office, and asserted that the former had been "drawn" from me by the latter. Apprehensive lest by some underhand work Mr. Macdougall might have been led to give apparent countenance to the falsehood: I warned him by letter, of the truth as above related. My dismay on his account may be conceived by you when it became apparent he was in secret communication with the party supporting our local newspaper, for I felt assured that had he, with deliberately formed purpose, set himself to damage his cause in the estimation of the half-breeds, he could not have more effectually done so than by taking the course indicated.⁵²

⁵¹United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, pp. 36-37, McDougall to Howe, Pembina, 20 Nov 1869.

⁵²A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letter from Mactavish to Howe, Fort Garry, 14 May 1870. Mactavish learned of many of the accusations made against him, especially by McDougall, when a copy of the Canadian Government Bluebook entitled Correspondence and Papers Connected with the Recent Occurrences in the North-West Territories, published early in 1870, arrived in the Settlement. He undertook to state his case in a thirty page letter drafted early in May 1870 intended for Joseph Howe. The copy of the letter in the Company files referred to above appears to be a draft, with words inserted and other words crossed out. It appears, too, to have been

Mactavish went on to complain that in spite of his having explained the matter to McDougall, McDougall persisted in distorting his reasons for issuing it, and his reasons for delaying its issue. He particularly resented the allegation that "the memorial of the people of Winnipeg was 'the last screw applied' to 'draw' from me any document which my office required me to publish in the interest of my successor."⁵³

Meanwhile, McDougall had been having his troubles at Pembina. Soon after arriving there on 30 October, he had led his party a short distance across the international border and moved into a nearby Hudson's Bay Company fort.⁵⁴ A few days later, an armed band of some twenty Métis from Red River galloped up to the fort and told him to return to the other side of the line.⁵⁵ McDougall did so, encamping

dictated, perhaps to J. J. Hargrave, since the handwriting, including the signature, is not Mactavish's. Mactavish in the letter objected to the publication of some of the letters and papers in the Bluebook, saying it was "a measure fraught with danger to persons now living in the Colony." He went on to point out that had the Bluebook reached the Settlement six weeks earlier than it did, which was entirely possible, it would have jeopardized both the negotiations with Canada and several of the people mentioned in the Bluebook.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 187, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 2 Nov 1869; Ibid., Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Red River, 9 Nov 1869.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 23, McDougall to Mactavish, Pembina, 7 Nov 1869.

on the farm of a Mr. Hayden a short distance south of the boundary line.⁵⁶

At about the same time, McDougall learned of the occupation of Fort Garry by the Métis. Speaking of it later, McDougall described the event as follows:

The rebels had found the gates open two weeks previously, were allowed to enter without protest, were accommodated with pemmican, brandy, tobacco, etc., ad libitum, by the obliging officers of the H. B. Company; and when asked, for form's sake, to walk out, declined with thanks! They laughed at the "protest" more boisterously, but not more heartily, than their willing captive, the unwilling protester, and then made themselves comfortable for the winter. Mr. Book-keeper Mactavish, no doubt, for form's sake also, charging the pemmican, brandy, etc., to the Canadian Government! As matters turned out, I frankly admit that my policy, in respect to Governor Mactavish and the Hudson's Bay Company's servants at Fort Garry, was not a success.⁵⁷

Writing to Mactavish at the time, McDougall said: "I am surprised to learn, by a communication brought by the bearer of this, that a few Rebels have been allowed to take your Fort, unopposed even by a public protest."⁵⁸ Reporting the event to Howe, he said: "I cannot account for this extraordinary reticence no proclamation and hasty surrender

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 22, McDougall to Mactavish, Pembina, 4 Nov 1869.

⁵⁷Willson, Life of Lord Strathcona, pp. 188-89.

⁵⁸United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 23, McDougall to Mactavish, Pembina, 7 Nov 1869.

of authority by the legal rulers of the country upon any theory but that of the weakness and imbecility of the Governor" and "treason within the Council."⁵⁹

Mactavish in May 1870 replied to the charge as follows:

My weakness, at the period to which the above extract refers was certainly so great that I believed it the precursor of death; but I deny the charge of "imbecility," which I think might, with far greater justice be brought against Mr. Macdougall and his party than against me and mine. I deny that our "surrender of authority" or "submission to orders" was more voluntary than the subsequent surrender of Mr. Macdougall's own compatriots, /referring to the later capture of the Schultz party/ or the "submission" of that gentleman himself, implied by his withdrawal from the Territory. I assert that his own plea of "having no force at command to re-establish the supremacy of the law" is also ours⁶⁰

He went on to say that:

In his letter to me, of 16 December, Mr. Macdougall refers to the occupation of Fort Garry by the half breeds, and mentions "The submission of the local authorities to" "The orders" of their leader. From the terms used and the general tone of his remarks, I could not very well escape the impression that the writer had meant to convey the insinuation that this had taken place with at least the passive consent of myself and fellow magistrates. The imputation of such conduct to one or more members of a magistracy would have been an act unjustifiable unless supported by the most weighty evidence. Conscious that no such evidence could exist, I hesitated to believe that I had rightly understood Mr. Macdougall's meaning. Unhappily

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 31, McDougall to Howe, Pembina, 13 Nov 1869.

⁶⁰A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letters from Mactavish to Howe, Fort Garry, 14 May 1870.

however this has now become unmistakable.⁶¹

Pointing out that "the ground on which Mr. Macdougall pretends to . . . base a belief in the connivance of the Company's officers at the seizure of their Fort, is contained in a report of Major Wallace, who appears to have been commissioned to act as a spy," Mactavish went on to describe Wallace as generally unreliable.⁶²

Some time after the fall of the fort, Mactavish heard that the Métis were planning an expedition against the 300 Enfield rifles the Canadian Government had sent with McDougall, and which McDougall had stored at the Hudson's Bay Company post at Georgetown, Minnesota.⁶³ As already pointed out, Mactavish had considered the Canadian Government's sending the rifles as entirely idiotic.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, he notified McDougall of the report, and McDougall took steps to have the arms and ammunition moved to Fort Abercrombie, in Dakotah Territory.⁶⁵ Still, McDougall's letters

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid.; see Chapter VIII, section on Howe.

⁶³United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 47, McDougall to Howe, Pembina, 25 Nov 1869.

⁶⁴A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish probably to W. G. Smith, 13/16 Oct 1869.

⁶⁵United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 47, McDougall to Howe, Pembina, 25 Nov 1869.

were full of complaints about the cooperation and treatment he was getting from Mactavish and the Hudson's Bay Company. One of the more frequent of these concerned the infrequency of letters from Mactavish and the excessive length of those he did receive. Mactavish replied in May 1870:

I must remind you that since the occupation of Fort Garry by the half-breeds on 2nd Nov, I have been virtually a prisoner; that the risk of miscarriage implied in sending a letter openly addressed to Mr. Macdougall, or any member of his party by the ordinary mail made such a step impracticable; and that at the time referred to I was confined to my house and bed with extreme illness. At no time were Mr. Macdougall or the misery of his position absent from my thoughts. I felt and feel most deeply on his account and that of the members of his party. Illegible or suggestions I had absolutely none to offer except those which, at the rare intervals complained of, I sent in the letters, the length of which appears to have been so unpalatable.

These letters were as Mr. Macdougall correctly supposes written by my legal advisor Mr. Black at a time when from excessive weakness I could only with difficulty sign my name. He is incorrect, however, in imputing to Mr. Black "personal views," the attainment of which might have "influenced the policy of the local authorities and found expression in their official correspondence."

As a man of much honor and integrity Mr. Black commands the fullest confidence of myself and Council, and I have no hesitation in assuming responsibility for any statement he has placed over my signature.⁶⁶

Mactavish had reported to the Company on 2 November that outgoing and incoming mail was subjected to examination.⁶⁷

⁶⁶A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letter from Mactavish to Howe, Fort Garry, 14 May 1870.

⁶⁷United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 187, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 2 Nov 1869.

This was corroborated by the local Canadian Party, who said that mail was being examined both ways, and that "particular pains are taken to see that no communication reaches the Governor, who is still said (?) to be very sick."⁶⁸

Another McDougall grievance was over supplies. He had been living off of supplies sent to him at Pembina by the Hudson's Bay Company. When they stopped coming in the second week in November, McDougall promptly blamed it on the Hudson's Bay Company.⁶⁹ About the same time, Mactavish received a note from Riel, "on the part of the French-speaking section of the population, but signed only by himself," protesting the Company's maintaining McDougall at Pembina, "and informing me that the Company's properties in this Country would be security for any trouble arising from Mr. McDougall's remaining there."⁷⁰ Mactavish said nothing of stopping the supplies, however, and it is difficult to tell whether he stopped them or Riel did it for him. The latter is more probable, particularly in view of the Métis' basic concern with supplies in general.

But even before they stopped coming, McDougall had

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 33, "Friends of Canada" to Dennis, Winnipeg, 12 Nov 1869; italics and question mark are letter writer's.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 31, McDougall to Howe, Pembina, 13 Nov 1869.

⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 185-86, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 16 Nov 1869.

been complaining about them, and Mactavish discussed his complaints on learning of them in May 1870:

Mr. Macdougall alludes in disparaging terms to the receipt from the Company of "a few articles of food and clothing, for which the prices charged are on the average higher than those of the American traders in the neighborhood." The accompanying copy of a document with which I was served some time previous to the date of his complaint, will give some idea of the difficulties we had illegible encounter in rendering him any service whatever. My utmost influence was used to obtain permission to send to Mr. Macdougall to ascertain his wants that they might be as far as possible supplied, and I was met with a positive refusal, and told that no consideration could be paid to his personal sufferings. I have directed enquiry to be made respecting his supplies, and find they include a pretty large assortment of articles the price of which amounts to a considerable sum. Some of these things were purchased by the Company for Mr. Macdougalls use from private merchants here, and the sum actually paid for them has been charged. The tariff rate at which the more important supplies have been valued is that we use at this place whence they were forwarded with some inconvenience and much risk to Pembina, and I cannot admit either that the prices are in themselves unreasonable, or on the average higher than those of the traders. They have not yet of course been paid for, and doubtless when our accounts come to be adjusted, all proper allowances will be made.⁷¹

Other grievances concerned the Company's involvement in the insurrection; his treatment by the "officials of the United States Government" (the local postmaster); and his treatment by the citizens of Pembina, a primarily Métis village of some eight to ten mud huts with thatch roofs that McDougall intimated was teeming with hot-eyed American

⁷¹A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letter from Mactavish to Howe, Fort Garry, 14 May 1870.

annexationists. Later, the scope of his grievances expanded. He blamed the Rebellion on Joseph Howe, "'the chief abettor, if not the chief instigator of the Red River trouble,'" on the "'foreign Jesuits, foreign adventurers, Canadian outlaws, Hudson's Bay Company employees and their ignorant dupes--the poor half breeds.'"⁷² Pembina, as he seemed to see it, was the center of a vast conspiracy against him. The real organizer of the Rebellion, he reported, was not Riel or the Catholic clergy but one Enos Stuttsman, an American citizen living in Pembina. Stuttsman, McDougall said, was the real brains behind the movement, and Riel's documents were sent to him for revision before they were issued.⁷³ In reality, there is little doubt that Stuttsman's feelings were sympathetic, even encouraging, toward the Métis cause, and that quite likely his aim was annexation of the territory to the United States, a goal inspired mainly by a land speculation scheme. But it is yet to be demonstrated that Stuttsman had any influence whatever on the Rebellion. The mud huts of Pembina were growing in McDougall's mind to such a colossal size that he could see little beyond them.

McDougall's antipathy to Pembina was due to some extent

⁷²Davidson, Louis Riel, p. 45.

⁷³United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 81, article in St. Paul Despatch, 31 Dec 1869.

to Pembina's antipathy to McDougall, the reasons for which are only partly to be found in local sympathy to the Red River Métis. Pembina, like most frontier settlements on America's advancing frontier, was subject to Indian attack, and an Indian attack was no laughing matter. McDougall at Pembina had made contact with several Indian tribes in the area, and the rumor spread that he was trying to incite them to attack Riel. Since aroused Indians tended to be indiscriminating in their objects of attack, the local citizens became apprehensive. McDougall was told that "the officials and residents of the village were very much excited in consequence of a rumour that the Indians were being armed by the Loyalists, and that the aid of the Sioux had been sought by some of the Canadians at Fort Garry."⁷⁴ "I believe they have called for troops from the nearest American Post (Fort Abercrombie) to protect them from the dreaded Sioux."⁷⁵ McDougall, however, was unsympathetic. He decided that "a wise, as well as a loyal and humane policy," would be to "threaten" (italics McDougall's) the citizens of Pembina with an Indian war "if they persisted in their rebellious designs":

I could not refrain from telling them at our Meeting of Monday evening, when the desperate character of the

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 66, McDougall to Howe, Pembina, 8 Dec 1869.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 67, McDougall to Howe, Pembina, 8 Dec 1869.

Sioux was portrayed to me, and I was urged to give immediate orders to the Loyal Settlers not to accept the help of Indians, that the possible consequences of an Indian War, ought to have been thought of by some people in the neighbourhood of Pembina, a few weeks ago. The remark was delivered in a serious tone, and with proper emphasis, and was received in solemn silence.⁷⁶

Since, contrary to McDougall's hallucinations, most of the citizens of Pembina were nothing more than sympathetic observers of the Rebellion, Stuttsman being an obvious exception, McDougall's inference that they were somehow responsible for the uprising and so would have to face the consequences of an Indian attack understandably left them at a loss for words. That McDougall was not popular in Pembina is not surprising; what might be surprising is that he got out of the village alive. Frontier communities often are not so forbearing.

But perhaps the community was intimidated. McDougall had taken to indulging in public rifle practice, partly to impress the local residents, he said, and partly to prepare himself for a rumored onslaught of Métis from Red River.⁷⁷ If the Métis came down to attack him in Pembina, he wrote MacDonald, "we will shoot without hesitation for this is the country where everyone shoots when he has a mind to."⁷⁸

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷E. E. Kreutzweiser, The Red River Insurrection, its Causes and Events (Gardenvale, Quebec, n.d.), p. 49.

⁷⁸Ibid.

No attack came, but then "two or three desperados and out-laws" "with a murderous intent" were rumored to be after him early in December, and Richards, Provencher, and another Alexander Begg, all in McDougall's party, moved into McDougall's house "and prepared to resist an attack from any quarter. We kept watch by night and by day, and had all our arms ready for action."⁷⁹ But again nothing happened, and McDougall's rifle practice, unless it had served as a deterrent, went for naught.

Part of McDougall's inability to analyze the situation correctly can be blamed on his informants. Red River Canadians were passing on to him as reliable intelligence some of the most imaginative fiction to come out of the Rebellion. A "Young Englishman" newly arrived in Red River wrote on 11 November to a member of the McDougall party that:

. . . the [the Company] did not mind letting them into the Fort, which, with the help of the loyal, they might easily have held; but it is evident, between you and me, that they at first were well pleased at the way things were working, and even since I was here, when the half-breeds heard that Mr. McDougall left for Ottawa, they gave up the Fort, but returned next day and got it again.⁸⁰

Another anonymous letter stated that "the actual number of

⁷⁹United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 66, McDougall to Howe, Pembina, 8 Dec 1869.

⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 32-33, "Young Englishman" to Alexander Begg, 11 Nov 1869.

the disaffected do not exceed 250 men, all told, and the slightest opposition would reduce that number to the original 40, including the priests at their head."⁸¹ A third anonymous letter said: "The Company beyond all question are deeply concerned in the matter."⁸²

McDougall undoubtedly was under some psychological strain at Pembina, was in no position to observe the situation at first hand, and had to rely on reports from people in the Settlement. Here, however, he showed an almost total inability to choose correctly between the reports he preferred to believe and those he should have believed. Throughout his stay at Pembina he was kept informed fairly reliably by Colonel Dennis, and Dennis's reports were endorsed by Mactavish.⁸³ Nevertheless, McDougall showed in his letters to Howe a lamentable tendency to rely on information coming from the so-called "Friends of Canada," a patriotic group whose patriotism was exceeded only by its longing for semi-anonymity. McDougall may have been swayed here by his connection with John Schultz. Schultz and McDougall evidently

⁸¹Ibid., p. 22, Anonymous to McDougall, Winnipeg, 5 Nov 1869.

⁸²Begg, Creation of Manitoba, p. 57.

⁸³United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, pp. 16-18, Mactavish to McDougall, Red River, 30 Oct 1869.

had been friends in Ontario before Schultz moved out to Red River, and they had kept in touch subsequently.⁸⁴ Most of McDougall's previous information on conditions in Red River had come from Schultz.⁸⁵ Some of the letters McDougall received at Pembina he suspected as having been written by Schultz, and he may have relied on them rather than on Dennis's reports out of habit or respect for their old friendship. This seems the most likely explanation of behavior on the part of an intelligent man that otherwise suggests a striking degree of stupidity. Mactavish demonstrated the fallacy of McDougall's methods by showing what idle rumor portrayed McDougall's own character to be:

Mr. Macdougall supports his unfavorable opinion of Hudson's Bay officials by quoting "The confirmed belief of every person he has seen" "or whose testimony has reached him", and the allegations of certain "Friends of Canada" in the settlement with whom he was in correspondence. For the opinion of individuals, how generally entertained soever they may be, I cannot be responsible. As a public man, Mr. Macdougall must be well aware how often public opinion is at variance with fact, and how much more than usual this is likely to be the case at a time of tumult, such as the present. Were I inclined to retaliate, I could illegible false and insidious reports having illegible regarding himself. Apart from the more absurd charges of "Priest murder" and the like, which have been industriously circulated to his disparagement, there have been others to which recent events have imparted a certain amount of plausibility. It has been asserted for so long a period even as that since the time of Mr. Snow's first arrival in the place, that Mr. Macdougall was acting in concert

⁸⁴Joseph Kinsey Howard, Strange Empire (New York, 1952), p. 88.

⁸⁵Ibid.

with the most unpopular and illegible of factions in the settlement encouraging them in their defiance of existing authority and inviting their cooperation in a policy the aim of which was to commit the Canadian Government irretrievably to some course of action with regard to the North West.⁸⁶

Mactavish was particularly bothered by McDougall's tendency to disregard the reliable reports he was getting:

The facility with which Mr. Macdougall was misled by the misrepresentations of the "Friends of Canada", is to my view the more astonishing that he had in his possession reports from members of his own party highly corroborative of those with which I had myself furnished him.

I allude to the letters of Colonel Dennis and Mr. Provencher, dated respectively 27th Oct and 2nd /? Nov. The description of public feeling contained in the former of these communications, I conceive to be very much the same as that which I had the honor of laying before Mr. Macdougall, more especially in my letter to him dated 30th Oct.

Mr. Provencher's report contains a very graphic account of what I would have expected him to see and hear during his visit to the French camp at St. Norbert. Neither report can I believe be quoted as containing ground for hasty or hostile action. Colonel Dennis fully describes and accounts for the disinclination of the English speaking population to take up arms.

Mr. Provencher says quite enough to convey an impression of the ignorance of the half-breeds and to indicate the illegible and influences by which they were guided.⁸⁷

But if it was Schultz and his friends that McDougall relied on for information and guidance, then it was Schultz

⁸⁶A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letter from Mactavish to Howe, Fort Garry, 14 May 1870.

⁸⁷Ibid.

and his friends who were largely responsible for what resulted eventually in McDougall's political downfall--the issuing by McDougall of three spurious proclamations on 1 and 2 December. There is no indication that before McDougall left Ottawa for Red River any detailed discussions took place on the exact timing for McDougall's assuming the reins of government. The arrangements were apparently left in a vague state--McDougall would take over when the Queen issued her proclamation of the transfer. This ignored the length of time it would take the news of the proclamation to reach McDougall at Red River. Mail took a little more than a week to get from England to Canada, and another eighteen days or so to get from Canada to Red River. If the proclamation were issued on schedule, on 1 December, McDougall would not receive the necessary documents until near the end of December. In effect, this would have left a hiatus in government at Red River, though no doubt the Company would have remained in authority until McDougall's papers arrived. There seemed no need in Ottawa in September 1869, however, to make more definite arrangements for McDougall's takeover. McDougall's correspondence betrays no such arrangements, in any case, and Mactavish and his government had received no word whatever from the Canadian Government regarding the details of the transfer. They knew of McDougall's coming only through rumors, newspaper reports and

private letters from people in the east, like Taché.

McDougall's early correspondence from Pembina indicated that he intended to await notification of the transfer until he assumed control of the government.⁸⁸ The more he became enmeshed in the Rebellion's web, however, and the more his wounded pride festered, the more he came to believe that, though precision in the transfer had not been provided for, precision was necessary:

In the present state of affairs in the Settlement, it is of the utmost importance to announce the transfer of Authority in the most authentic and solemn manner possible, in order to give confidence and the protection of legality to the acts of the loyal and well-disposed, and to put the malcontents and their American advisers and sympathizers publicly and technically in the wrong.⁸⁹

And, after the deed had been done:

I notice the remark in your Despatch, that I can "claim or assert no authority in the Hudson's Bay Territory until the Queen's Proclamation reaches me through this (your) Office," If I had so read my Commission and the Acts of Parliament, the Rebel Government would have been formally inaugurated during the interregnum which must have occurred between the 1st of December (which the Rebels, as well as the Hudson's Bay Company's Agents knew and believed to be the date of the transfer), and the time when your messenger could reach me.⁹⁰

Pushing him on in his decision were the "Friends of

⁸⁸United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 31, McDougall to Howe, Pembina, 14 Nov 1869.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 55, McDougall to Howe, Pembina, 29 Nov 1869.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 63, McDougall to Howe, Pembina, 6 Dec 1869.

Canada," who were flooding Pembina with recommendations to issue a proclamation. "Issue your Proclamation," they beckoned, "and it will be responded to by 500 men."⁹¹ These entreaties, plus his fears for a governmental interregnum, finally spurred McDougall into doing so. Basing his knowledge of the transfer date on "newspapers, from a private letter to me of the Deputy Governor of the Company, and my own knowledge before I left Ottawa,"⁹² McDougall proclaimed on 1 December 1869 in the name of Queen Victoria, the transfer of the North-West to Canada. On 2 December he issued another proclamation removing Mactavish from office:

. . . and I do hereby require and command that all and singular the public Officers and Functionaries holding Office in Rupert's Land and the North-Western Territory at the time of their admission into the Union as aforesaid, excepting the Public Officer or Functionary at the head of the administration of affairs, do continue in the execution of their several and respective Offices, duties, plans, and employments, until otherwise ordered by me under the authority of the said last-mentioned Act.⁹³

McDougall had gone across the border on the night of 1 December and read the transfer proclamation to the open plain, then returned to Pembina and arranged for the delivery

1869. ⁹¹Ibid., p. 32, Mair to McDougall, Winnipeg, 8 Nov

1869. ⁹²Ibid., p. 55, McDougall to Howe, Pembina, 29 Nov

⁹³Ibid., p. 61, McDougall Proclamation, 2 Dec 1869.

of copies of the proclamations to Red River. Soon they were circulating through the Settlement, and McDougall was speaking of their subduing effect on Riel and the Métis.⁹⁴ One informer stated that "it is believed the Insurrection is dying out--only about fifty Insurgents remain under arms. The remainder is disbanded, and a large portion of them have gone to the plains upon their winter buffalo hunt."⁹⁵ Mactavish did not receive a copy of any of the proclamations until several days later, when A. G. B. Bannatyne, visiting Fort Garry and finding that Mactavish had not seen the one putting him out of office, gave him a copy.⁹⁶

Apparently McDougall's first proclamation was printed in the Settlement and distributed in both French and English. An American in the Settlement named George B. Winship, a former employee for the Nor'-Wester, stated that, though Métis guards were occupying the offices of both newspapers, his status as an American enabled him to gain access to the Nor'-Wester office, where he managed to sneak out enough type and forms to print up McDougall's proclamation in his

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 63, McDougall to Howe, Pembina, 6 Dec 1869.

⁹⁵Ibid., pp. 34-35, telegram, H. P. Dwight to MacDonald, St. Paul, 6 Dec 1869.

⁹⁶Begg, Creation of Manitoba, p. 123.

hotel room.⁹⁷ Mactavish was given one of the English copies.⁹⁸

The convention of English and French delegates (to be discussed later) that met on 1 December in the Settlement was interrupted by the arrival of an advance copy of McDougall's first proclamation. The French delegates promptly worked up a list of rights that they proposed be submitted to the Canadian Parliament for ratification. The English agreed to the list, but said a delegation should be sent to McDougall instead, and on his acceptance of it he should be admitted to the territory. Riel insisted that McDougall would not be admitted until the list of rights was ratified by the Canadian Parliament, and "dismissed the English with contempt."⁹⁹ The convention dissolved.

McDougall's gamble had further repercussions. He wrote to Howe on 2 December: "I hope I am right in using the name of Her Majesty as prominently as I have done,"¹⁰⁰ but as a matter of fact, he was not. On learning from McDougall of his troubles, John A. MacDonald, the Canadian

⁹⁷P.A.M., Winship's Account, Chap VII, p. 13.

⁹⁸Begg, Creation of Manitoba, p. 123.

⁹⁹Morton, Manitoba, p. 129.

¹⁰⁰United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 60, McDougall to Howe, Pembina, 2 Dec 1869.

Prime Minister, had cancelled the payment of money to the Company for the territory and announced that Canada would not take over the country until it was pacified.¹⁰¹ Unfortunately, the postponement was made too late to notify McDougall before he had issued his proclamations. A warning letter from Howe written on 19 November could not have reached McDougall until several days after 1 December.¹⁰² McDougall got little sympathy from the east, however:

As it would appear . . . that you have used the Queen's name without Her authority, attributed to Her Majesty acts which she has not yet performed, and organized an armed force within the Territory of the Hudson Bay Company without warrant or instructions, I am commanded to assure you that the grave occurrences which you report have occasioned here great anxiety."¹⁰³

The armed force mentioned above referred to the third McDougall proclamation, issued on 2 December, that made Dennis his deputy to act for him in the Settlement and instructed him to raise an armed force to put down the Rebellion. Dennis, who had left the Settlement, promptly made his way back and set about recruiting a force. Mactavish considered the project "incredibly rash":

¹⁰¹See Appendix G for further discussion of transfer.

¹⁰²United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 10, Howe to McDougall, Ottawa, 19 Nov 1869.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 83, Howe to McDougall, Ottawa, 24 Dec 1869.

The season of the year which compelled combatants to fight against the elements and forced non-combatants to face the chances of extermination in their winter-bound homes, was utterly unsuited for belligerent operations. In default of some deplorable tragedy the inglorious termination which befell the undertaking was precisely what I should have expected would occur.¹⁰⁴

Mactavish was not alone in these sentiments. Dennis discussed the advisability of proclaiming martial law in the territory with Bishop Machray, the only man on the Council of Assiniboia to vote for raising an armed force against the Métis at the barricade. But "such a thing seemed to frighten him," Dennis reported.¹⁰⁵ Both because of Machray's advice and because his attempts to raise an armed force had been disappointing in the extreme, Dennis eventually gave up the project.¹⁰⁶

Mactavish as late as 11 December was still accepting the proclamations at face value. Reporting the proclamation ejecting him from office, he said: "I being relieved of the office of Governor, the duty will, I suppose, for the present,

¹⁰⁴A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letter from Mactavish to Howe, Red River, 14 May 1870.

¹⁰⁵United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 64, Dennis to McDougall, Lower Fort Garry, 2 Dec 1869.

¹⁰⁶Stanley, Birth of Western Canada, pp. 81-82.

be attended to by Colonel Dennis¹⁰⁷ It was a question that did not overly concern Mactavish, though, as he for some weeks had had no control of the government whatever.

McDougall's dethroning of Mactavish had little effect on the Rebellion,¹⁰⁸ but his authorizing Dennis to raise an armed force might have. Alexander Begg suggested that a group of Métis might have sent a deputation to McDougall had not a group of Canadians passed noisily by the meeting place during the meeting on their way to answer Dennis's call to arms.¹⁰⁹ MacBeth described the event in more detail:

Besides all this, there was a time, even after the rebellion had gone some length, when, through the intervention of Mr. Bannatyne, three well-known French half-breeds, François Nolin, Augustin Nolin, and one Perreault, agreed to have a meeting of English and French to discuss their rights and send a statement of these to Mr. Macdougall, whom, if he granted them, they would bring into the country in spite of Riel. It is said on good authority that these men with others were actually in council on the matter when a report reached them that the Canadians, together with the

¹⁰⁷United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, pp. 190-91, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 11 Dec 1869.

¹⁰⁸For discussion of position that McDougall's proclamation had no effect on Mactavish or government of Assiniboia because Riel had already brought that government to an end, see Chapter XIII.

¹⁰⁹Begg, Creation of Manitoba, p. 123.

English-speaking settlers, were combining to attack the French. This seemed to the friendly half-breeds to mean that the French element was to be coerced without regard to their rights, and hence, though some of the French half-breeds never joined Riel, the opposition offered by these movements against him practically solidified the great body of them in sympathy with his position, and led to serious consequences.¹¹⁰

Dennis's activities also resulted in the capture of a large number of Canadians at Schultz's store in Winnipeg. On first arriving in the Settlement with his commission from McDougall, Dennis had begun by collecting and drilling a number of Canadians and Saulteaux Indians at Lower Fort Garry, where he had established his headquarters. Faced with an otherwise disappointing response, however, Dennis had sent a number of the Canadians back to Winnipeg to await McDougall's call to arms. The Canadians in Winnipeg soon began to gather at Schultz's store, loudly declaring their intent to defend to the death some Canadian Government supplies, mainly pork, that had been stored there.

McDougall had called Mactavish's attention to the pork early in November.¹¹¹ McDougall

wrote me stating that he was informed by some of the Canadians here, that some Government provisions, stored in Dr. Schult's warehouse, was threatened to be seized by the Canadian half-breeds, and calling upon me to protect it in Dr. Schultz's Store, or get it removed to a place of safety. As Mr. Grant, who

¹¹⁰MacBeth, Making of the Canadian West, pp. 52-54.

¹¹¹United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 58, McDougall to Mactavish, Pembina, 5 Nov 1869.

has charge of the provisions, preferred to have a guard of policemen set over it, I have put eight men to watch it, but I fear it may be the cause ultimately of a collision, which, as the people in the Settlement are a good deal excited at present, would no doubt be serious.¹¹²

A collision, though, which they felt would bring much of the English-speaking part of the Settlement to their support, might have been what the Canadians had in mind. And it might have worked. Winship, the American referred to earlier, reported that:

Intense excitement prevailed in town, and the trend of sentiment was toward the defense of the white men. Arms were burnished and ammunition procured ready for a possible emergency. The last two nights before the surrender were the most critical. Nearly everybody slept on his arms ready for service at a moment's call; and, as previously stated, if the half-breeds had assaulted the White Store the neutral element in town would have been aroused¹¹³

Previously, Winship had said: "Had blood been shed there, it would have been the signal for the massing of the white element against the half-breeds, and a different story of the outcome would have been written into the history of the rebellion."¹¹⁴

But no blood was shed. Having ignored an order from Dennis to retreat to the Lower Fort, the Canadians soon found themselves surrounded by Métis. When several attempts

¹¹²Ibid., pp. 188-89, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 30 Nov 1869.

¹¹³P.A.M., Winship's Account, Chap. VIII, p. 5.

¹¹⁴Ibid., Chap. VII, pp. 10-11.

at negotiating with Riel failed, the forty-five Canadians, including Schultz, surrendered without a shot, "captured like a coop of chickens" by a "bar-room loafer" and driven into Fort Garry like a "flock of sheep."¹¹⁵

All this proved discouraging to McDougall; his early enthusiasm for his proclamations faded as he realized that nothing was going to come of them. And when he learned that the Canadian Government had postponed the transfer he felt, as he told the St. Paul Despatch, "it placed him in a position where he felt that he had no authority to proceed further."¹¹⁶ But before leaving Pembina on 18 December, he "thought it prudent, in view of future possible questions and responsibilities, to write the enclosed Letter to Mr. McTavish"¹¹⁷ on 16 December:

I observe by a paragraph in the "Montreal Gazette" that the Dominion Government have telegraphed their Agent in London to withhold the payment to the Hudson Bay Company of the purchase money agreed to be paid to them for the transfer of their rights in Rupert's Land. I have no official confirmation of this statement, but will not be surprised if it should prove true.

¹¹⁵New Nation, Friday, 10 Jun 1870; the allusions are Joseph Howe's, who in a speech in the House of Commons was carrying his war with McDougall and the local Canadians to the enemy.

¹¹⁶United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 81, article in St. Paul Despatch, 31 Dec 1869.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 73, McDougall to Howe, Pembina, 16 Dec 1869.

Under these circumstances, it becomes important to consider carefully the legal position of all parties in the present crisis. I venture to submit my views of the case as it stands in the North-West Territories.

If, in consequence of the action of the Dominion Government, the surrender and transfer of the Country did not take place on the first day of December as previously agreed upon, then you are the Chief Executive Officer as before, and responsible for the preservation of the peace, and the enforcement of the Law.

If, on the other hand, the transfer did take place on the first day of December, then, I take it, my Commission came into force, and the notice in the form of Proclamation issued by my authority on that day, correctly recited the facts and disclosed the legal status of the respective parties.¹¹⁸

Having thus, in his own inimitable style, clarified the situation for Mactavish, McDougall wended his way back to Canada.

But though McDougall was gone, Mactavish, illness and all, probably fumed on. In fact, it might have been fortunate all around that Mactavish's letters to McDougall at Pembina were actually written by John Black, for Mactavish had become highly incensed. Writing in May 1870, after having calmed down a bit, he said:

I may remark nevertheless that I am quite alive to the injudicious tone assumed by Mr. Macdougall in his communications both with me and others. I however feel his position too keenly to embitter it with recriminating remarks addressed to people who already regarded him with no friendly eye.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 75, McDougall to Mactavish, Pembina, 16 Dec 1869.

¹¹⁹A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letter from Mactavish to Howe, Fort Garry, 14 May 1870.

He went on to sum up the situation he had been faced with and the measures that had been taken:

Mr. Macdougall is incorrect in representing us as supine in taking measures of a kind more likely to be effective than the issue of unintelligible writings in bringing home a sense of propriety to these misguided people. I reasoned with all their leaders, long and earnestly, in private conversation. Though myself unable to attend its meetings, I know that the Council of Assiniboia also exercised all its influence in the right direction. Our representation of the awful consequences of armed Rebellion however had no apparent effect on men accustomed to the rough life of the plains and the vicissitudes of the chase, whose property is but small, and who have no practical acquaintance with the restraints recognized by civilized men. The powerful aid of the Priesthood was earnestly solicited, but without success.¹²⁰

Earlier, though, he had been less composed. Writing to his brother Dugald in Montreal on 4 November, two days after the Canadian Party's twelve years of agitation against himself and the Métis had culminated in the seizure of Fort Garry by the Métis, and further distraught by an illness that permitted him to do little about the crisis raging through the Settlement, Mactavish said:

I will not speak of our dignity, but it is more than flesh and blood can bear that we who have conducted the Government of this country for years with a view to the welfare and best interests of all classes of the inhabitants, should be summarily ejected from office, as if we were the commonest usurping scoundrels. Why should we be in such indecent haste to cut our own throats? What are the Canadians to us that we should

¹²⁰Ibid.

fall into their arms the moment they approach us?¹²¹

At another time Mactavish said: "Privately, as one man to another, it is a question whether McDougall should not be starved out for his arrogance."¹²²

A Canadian testified that A. G. B. Bannatyne told him that Mactavish, on hearing a McDougall letter read at a Council meeting on 8 November,

raged furiously, and asked what Mr. McDougall meant; that, up to that moment, no official information had reached them of any change having been made in the ownership of Rupert's Land, and that he would let Mr. McDougall know that no such dictation as that indicated by the Letter would, for a moment, be tolerated.¹²³

Mactavish later denied having said it, and there is no doubt that he was not present at the Council meeting mentioned.¹²⁴ Furthermore, the Canadian responsible for the story, "J. W." (James Wallace), had developed a suspiciously facile ability to dredge interesting quotes out of

¹²¹Willson, Life of Lord Strathcona, p. 188; this letter was shown by Dugald to his superior, Donald A. Smith, who was in charge of the Company's Montreal Department, resulting in a priggish, pedantic, completely uncalled-for little lecture from Smith to Mactavish on Mactavish's attitude.

¹²²Ibid., pp. 263-65.

¹²³United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 48, Notes by J. W., between 4 and 22 Nov 1869.

¹²⁴A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letter from Mactavish to Howe, Fort Garry, 14 May 1870.

Bannatyne.

Some excuse might be allowed Mactavish for anger, however; his encounter with William McDougall had been a trying one:

In fact, the tone of Mr. McDougall's whole correspondence with, and regarding, the authorities in the Settlement, was one of irritability, censure and a want of confidence in their willingness to assist him in his predicament. Instead of writing to Mr. MacTavish in a friendly manner, he saw fit to insinuate that there was no apparent desire on the part of the authorities to put down the rebellion; and, moreover, he undertook to make suggestions as to what should have been done, under the circumstances, by Mr. MacTavish, and found fault with what was done. When it is remembered that William MacTavish had spent the greater portion of his lifetime in the North-West--during a part of which he occupied the important positions of Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company and of the Colony of Assiniboia--when we recollect that he was a man respected by all classes--a man of the strictest integrity, and, moreover, thoroughly acquainted with the people of the country, it must be admitted that, when Mr. McDougall set himself up as an adviser to such a man as to how he should act in the discharge of his duties, he certainly placed himself in a very ridiculous position.¹²⁵

But placing himself, and those around him, in ridiculous positions seemed to be McDougall's main talent. Such is what he did to John Dennis, for instance, who was ordinarily an intelligent and able man. And such he might under different circumstances have done to Mactavish. It was just as well that Mactavish was in no position to be unduly affected by McDougall's proclamations. And such was what he did to the

¹²⁵Begg, Creation of Manitoba, pp. 55-56.

Canadian Government, though here it must be admitted that if McDougall embarrassed John A. MacDonald and the Canadian Government, MacDonald and the Government, by postponing the transfer, did at least as much for McDougall. In any case, it was just as well that he was gone.

CHAPTER XI

THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENTS

Riel's Rebellion had all the while been gaining momentum in the Settlement. Mactavish wrote that the Métis leader was "every day strengthening himself, and all our work-people are with him."¹ Soon after taking over the fort, Riel had undertaken to form a government, hopefully one with the support of the Settlement at large, thus broadening his base of power, but in any case one that would give his "excessive executive ability"² some semblance of legality, a measure that among other things might ward off future retribution. On 6 November he invited ten of the English parishes and the town of Winnipeg to send twelve representatives to meet with French representatives on 16 November to consider the political state of the country and decide what measures to take for the future. There was some hesitation on the part of the Settlement to respond. The English-speaking settlers in the main were sympathetic to the Métis, but like the more settled and educated of the French they saw no need for the Rebellion and wanted to have nothing to do with it. Nevertheless, the English parishes after much discussion decided to send delegates, and on the day appointed twelve English and twelve

¹Willson, *Life of Lord Strathcona*, pp. 263-265.

²Garrioch, Correction Line, p. 306.

French representatives gathered at Fort Garry.

They were met by Mactavish's proclamation, but still deliberated for two days before adjourning until 22 November. On reconvening, a split between the two camps soon became apparent. The English felt that McDougall should be admitted and negotiations with Canada carried on through the Council of Assiniboia. The French declared that McDougall "could only be brought into the Settlement over their dead bodies."³ Riel went on to say that the Company's government was weak and incompetent, that it had forfeited its right to govern the Settlement when it had agreed to the transfer in March 1869, and that provisional government should be formed. Riel spent that evening persuading the French to back a provisional government whether the English wanted to join in or not.⁴ The English the next day decided they needed to consult their parishes on the matter. The convention broke up on that note, with the delegates agreeing to reconvene on 1 December.

Bolstered by the decision of the Métis council to form a provisional government, Riel deposed the Council of Assiniboia. On 23 November, Mactavish wrote:

³United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 188, Mactavish to W.G. Smith, Fort Garry, 23 Nov 1869.

⁴Begg's Journal, Intro. by Morton, pp. 62-63.

Early this morning Louis Riel, the leader of the French half-breeds, requested Mr. John H. Mactavish, the Accountant here, to come over to the office; and on Mr. Mactavish going there, Riel, accompanied by a number of armed men, called on him to give up the public accounts. This he refused to do, on which Riel told him he would be compelled by force to do so. It ended in Riel taking possession of the Land Register, the book in which the account of the Governor and Council of Assiniboine with the Fur Trade was kept, and the Cash Blotter, no doubt with a view to making out the balance of the Colonial Public Funds with the Fur Trade, for the purpose of demanding it to be paid over.⁵

Alexander Begg pointed out that Riel in making this move had undertaken "to overthrow the existing Government at one sweep; and, in seizing the books and records of the Colony, were interfering with the rights and privileges of the rest of the Settlement."⁶ Begg also said that about the same time Riel placed Mactavish under arrest, and that he was still under arrest on 29 November.⁷ Davidson said much the same thing, saying that Riel arrested Mactavish either because he thought Mactavish had deceived him or because he wanted to demonstrate to the delegates that the Company as a government was powerless.⁸ Mactavish in his letters to

⁵United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 188, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 23 Nov 1869.

⁶Begg, Creation of Manitoba, p. 97.

⁷Begg, History of the North-West, I, p. 404; Begg's Journal, p. 190.

⁸Davidson, Louis Riel, p. 40.

the Company of 23 and 30 November, however, said nothing of his being held prisoner.⁹

On 1 December, apparently in response to McDougall's proclamation, the reconvening delegates produced their first list of rights. Mactavish wrote:

This party has published a List of the "Rights" which they demand from Canada, and a Declaration which purports to be made on the part of the people of Rupert's Land and the North-West. But, of course, the great majority of the inhabitants have not authorized either Bruce or Riel to act for them, and, in point of fact, the great bulk of them object to the means used to enforce their rights.¹⁰

After dismissing the delegates on 1 December when the English-speaking representatives insisted on dealing with McDougall, Riel went through a period of anxiety during which his support began to drift away. The efforts of Dennis to arouse the English-speaking part of the Settlement against them cemented Metis ranks, however, and his capture of the large body of Canadians in Schultz's store further solidified his position. On 8 December Riel proclaimed a provisional government, dating its inception at 24 November. Two days later he raised the flag of the new provisional

⁹United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 188, Mactavish to W.G. Smith, Fort Garry, 23 Nov 1869; Ibid., pp. 188-189, Mactavish to W.G. Smith, Fort Garry, 30 Nov 1869.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 190-91, Mactavish to W.G. Smith, Fort Garry, 11 Dec 1869.

government. A Mrs. Bernard Ross, visiting Mrs. Mactavish at the time, described the event as seen from Mactavish's house:

While I was there chatting with Mrs. McTavish, in came Mr. Bannatyne, and said, "They are going to hoist their flag." He said to look out of the window, and we did so. I can see the people yet, filling all the square and talking excitedly. They all had guns. There was a sort of platform at the foot of the high flagstaff in the centre, and Riel and O'Donoghue and Lepine, and I forget who else, were up on it and they made speeches, and their followers waved their guns and cheered. There were double windows, and so we could not hear anything of the speeches. Mr. Bannatyne said, "I think I can bring in the Governor. He is well enough to walk." Governor McTavish came into the room and looked out the window just as they were hauling up the flag of Riel's government, which had the French fleur-de-lis on a white background, to which the shamrock was afterwards added. And then they all fired off their guns and the cannon of the Fort were fired, too. The Governor said, "Oh, the fools! the fools!"¹¹

Mrs. Ross may have altered Mactavish's comment here to make it more closely conform to her conception of high drama, but Mactavish apparently was considerably agitated. R.G. MacBeth wrote:

I remember, too, hearing my father, who visited Governor McTavish in his sickroom about this time, say that he never witnessed anything more pathetic than the way in which the Governor referred to the fact that the insurgents had hauled down the Union Jack and hoisted an ensign of their own devise with fleur-de-lis and shamrock, and how he said, "As I saw, through my window, the hoisting of their rag on our old flagstaff, I almost choked with morti-

¹¹Healy, Women of Red River, pp. 228-29.

fication and shame."¹²

His comment in his letter to the Company was less emotional: "Yesterday the party hoisted a flag, which was saluted with much formality. About sixty scholars of the Roman Catholic Seminary here, conducted by a Roman Catholic priest, assisted at the ceremony."¹³

Meanwhile, Sir John Young, the Governor-General of Canada, had issued a proclamation offering an amnesty to all who would immediately desist from the Rebellion, and the Canadian Government sent two commissioners, Colonel Charles de Salaberry and Father J.B. Thibault, to assess the situation and learn Riel's terms. Thibault reached Red River on 24 December, de Salaberry on 6 January. From their arrival their movements were severely restricted by Riel, and Mactavish announced that "from what I see, I do not think their mission will have any success."¹⁴ Riel in the meantime, on 27 December, became President of the provisional government in place of John Bruce, who had resigned.

¹²MacBeth, Making of the Canadian West, p. 47.

¹³United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, pp. 190-91, Mactavish to W.G. Smith, Fort Garry, 11 Dec 1869.

¹⁴A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W.G. Smith, Fort Garry, 28 Dec 1869.

At about the same time that de Salaberry and Thibault had been sent, the Canadian Government also dispatched a third commissioner, Donald A. Smith, the head of the Hudson's Bay Company's Montreal Department. He arrived three days after Thibault, and reported that Riel:

. . . received me courteously, and contrary to the usual custom allowed my luggage to pass without being searched, and since that date I have been here virtually confined to the Fort, as is the case with Governor Mactavish and all officers of the Company here, for without permission of Mr. Riel and his friends none may come in or go out.

When Mactavish learned that Smith had come as a Canadian Commissioner he wrote that it was unfortunate the Canadian Government sent as one of its commissioners an employee of the Company.¹⁶ Mactavish did not learn that Smith was a

¹⁵United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 204, D.A. Smith to W.G. Smith, Fort Garry, 1 Jan 1870; Thomas Bunn said Smith stayed in Mactavish's house in the fort: Preliminary Investigation and Trial of Ambroise D. Lepine (Winnipeg, 1874), p. 70, Bunn Testimony; J.J. Hargrave said he lived "in the same house with a crowd of Riel's half breeds who continually watch all they do: P.A.C., MacDonald Papers, Vol 101, part 2, J.J. Hargrave to Sir Curtis Lampson, Fort Garry, 8 Feb 1870; Mrs. William Cowan said he stayed at the Cowans': Healy, Women of Red River, p. 47: probably he did all three, staying with the Cowans on first arriving and until the house was taken over by the Métis, remaining in it a few days with the Métis, then moving to Mactavish's.

¹⁶United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, pp. 205-206, Mactavish to W.G. Smith, Fort Garry, 22 Jan 1870.

commissioner right away, however:

Last evening Mr. Chief Factor Donald A. Smith and Mr. Chief Trader Richard Hardisty arrived here, and were at once taken before Riel, who, after examining them, took them over to Doctor Cowan. I have seen Mr. Smith only for a short time last evening, but I learned from him that there was some probability of his being appointed a commissioner to arrange the matters in dispute.¹⁷

Possibly Smith did not tell Mactavish he was already a Commissioner for fear that Mactavish was involved with Riel and would reveal Smith's mission. Smith had even left his papers at Pembina, ostensibly so they would not be appropriated by Riel. All this leaves unanswered the reason for Smith's craving for secrecy. In view of the limited authority he had been given, it probably resulted more from his penchant for increasing his importance through dramatic techniques than from a fear that his commission would be confiscated. When the excess verbiage is cleared away it can be seen that Smith's commission was much like those of de Salaberry and Thibault except that it gave him power to deal with the Métis in concert with Mactavish and McDougall. Since McDougall had returned to Canada this left Smith with no power to "arrange the matters in dispute" at all, and he was well aware of that. Smith may have realized that he was a more impressive figure without his commission than with it, par-

¹⁷Ibid., p. 188, Mactavish to W.G. Smith, Fort Garry, 23 Nov 1869.

ticularly if he could thereby add an air of mystery and suspense to his presence.

But in addition to his commission, Smith had been authorized to try to buy off Riel's support, and he soon set to work trying to do just that, adopting "the suggestion of Governor Mactavish of working quietly and individually among some of the less enthusiastic of Riel's supporters."¹⁸

Helped by Mactavish and others, he was to some extent successful.¹⁹ As Riel saw his support dwindling, he decided to cooperate with Smith. Asking to see his credentials and told they were in Pembina, Riel offered to send for them. Smith, however, insisted on sending Hardisty for them, and Hardisty set out for Pembina with one of Riel's guards. When Mactavish heard of it he suspected foul play on Riel's part and sent off three half-breeds named Angus McKay, Pierre Leveille, and John F. Grant to make sure Smith's papers got to Smith.²⁰ Unaware of this, Riel with Ritchot set out to intercept Hardisty on his return, but on doing so "found himself looking down the barrel of Leveille's pistol."²¹ Ritchot was pushed aside and told "not to inter-

¹⁸Stanley, Birth of Western Canada, p. 91.

¹⁹C.A. Boulton, Reminiscences of the North-West Rebellion (Toronto, 1886), p.95.

²⁰Begg, Creation of Manitoba, p. 219.

²¹Stanley, Louis Riel, pp. 87-88.

fere any further with matters unconnected with his spiritual duties."²² The party then returned to Fort Garry and delivered the papers to Smith.²³

A mass meeting was held in the court yard of Fort Garry on 19 January to hear Smith read his commission and other papers. Mactavish beforehand was busy rounding up the attendance of key Settlers for the meeting. Thomas Bunn testified that he got a letter from Mactavish asking him in a friendly way to come to the meeting.²⁴ The meeting was continued the next day, and as a result it was decided to convene on 25 January a convention of twenty English and twenty French delegates to discuss Smith's message and decide on a course of action.

²²Ibid.

²³The altercation over Smith's credentials might have been responsible for a rumor that swept all the way to London in late January and early February. The rumor, conveyed to the Company in London by its agent in St. Paul, N.W. Kittson, and to Earl Granville by Sir John Young, was to the effect that Mactavish had been restored to the head of the government and Riel had been arrested but later released: P.A.M., United States: Letters Received by State Department from Agent for Red River Affairs, Taylor to Fish, Washington, 4 Feb 1870; United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 204, telegram from Kittson to W.G. Smith, St. Paul, n.d.; Ibid., p. 82, telegram from Young to Granville, 2 Feb 1870. Kittson several days later, however, wrote the Company that the report, originating in Pembina and transmitted from there to the St. Paul papers, was apparently false: Ibid., p. 207, Kittson to W.G. Smith, St. Paul, 5 Feb 1870.

²⁴Lepine Trial, p. 68, Bunn testimony; Bunn, an English half-breed, had been a member of the Council of Assiniboia and later became Secretary of the second provisional government.

Meanwhile, the Settlement had once more acquired a newspaper, this time one under the control of Riel. Entitled the New Nation and edited by a Major Henry Robinson, an American, the newspaper exhibited from its first issue, which appeared on 7 January 1870, a strong slant toward annexation of Red River Settlement to the United States. It was evidently a policy that was at least condoned by Riel, however, since Robinson was apparently the kind of man who mainly just did as he was told. A fellow American described him as neither a practical newspaper man nor one with much force of character. "He had a fair college education, and some experience in public affairs, but by nature he was meek and submissive, yielding obsequiously to another's will. The New Nation, therefore did not take high rank as a newspaper; it was simply the organ of the Riel government."²⁵ For some as yet unexplained reason, Riel later curbed the pro-United States annexation sentiments of the newspaper.

The new convention of English and French delegates met on schedule on 25 January. The delegates soon drew up a new list of rights, but all did not go Riel's way during the convention. On 5 February, as the delegates were engaged in getting up a new list of rights, Riel introduced a motion to include as one of them "that all bargains made with the

²⁵P.A.M., Winship's Account, Chap VIII, p. 8.

Hudson's Bay Company for the transfer of this territory shall be null and void; and that any arrangements for the transfer of the country shall be carried on only with the people of this country."²⁶ It was defeated, with a small group of Métis headed by Charles Nolin voting with the English.²⁷ Riel branded as traitors the Métis voting against him. Nolin retorted that he had not come there to vote as dictated by Riel.²⁸ Riel stormed out of the chamber and sought out Cowan and Mactavish:

On the afternoon of that day, Louis Riel called on Doctor Cowan, and with outrageous demonstrations of violence, threatened to have him shot within three hours. He immediately afterwards came to me with a similar threat. Returning to Doctor Cowan he required him to take an oath of allegiance to his government, producing a bible and a form of oath. The Doctor refused to comply, and Riel gave him twenty minutes to consider. Coming to me with the same demand, on my declining compliance, he told me I was under close guard, and a party of men was stationed in my house. He also immediately afterwards confined Doctor Cowan in the prison with the Canadians taken in December. All the Company's officers in Fort Garry were also confined within its walls.²⁹

²⁶Davidson, Louis Riel, p. 57.

²⁷Stanley, Louis Riel, pp. 93-94.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 12 Feb 1870.

Cowan was thrust into the same room with William Hallett, "a leading English half breed, who has of late distinguished himself by his activity in favour of Governor McDougall."³⁰ Four Métis were stationed on Mactavish's staircase and at his bedroom door.³¹ No one was to be allowed in or out of Mactavish's living area without Riel's permission.

That evening, however, A.G.B. Bannatyne, learning of Mactavish's imprisonment, tried to sneak into the fort by climbing over a wall.³² He was discovered, and retreated until the next day, Sunday. Sunday morning, with Henry McDermot, a brother-in-law of both he and Mactavish, Bannatyne succeeded in getting past the guards and into Mactavish's house. "There he found Mrs. MacTavish in a dreadful state at the condition of her husband."³³ After talking with Mactavish, Bannatyne and McDermot left for town. Riel, however, had in the meantime been told of their visit and rushed back to the fort from St. Boniface, sending a guard to bring them back. On returning to the fort, Bannatyne told Riel he would come into the fort any time he felt like it, whether Riel liked it or not. Riel took him prisoner, though he allowed McDermot to go free.³⁴

³⁰P.A.C., MacDonald Papers, Vol 101, part 2, J.J. Hargrave to Sir Curtis Lampson, Fort Garry, 8 Feb 1870.

³¹Ibid.

³²Begg, Creation of Manitoba, pp. 263-64.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

Squabbling in the convention continued when it resumed on 7 February, much of it over the position taken by the English Settlers that since the Council of Assiniboia, with Mactavish at its head, was still the Settlement's legal government they had no right to set up a provisional government. Their insistence that Mactavish be consulted in the matter led to the sending of a delegation of two English and two French--John Sutherland, John Frazer, Ambroise Lepine, and Xavier Page--to Mactavish's room to interview him.³⁵ Versions of the conversation that took place in Mactavish's bedroom are many,³⁶ but Mactavish apparently told them in a highly agitated state to form a government and restore order, but refused to delegate his authority. He apparently recognized the practical need for some sort of working government, but refused to legalize the affair by delegating his authority.

When the delegation returned and relayed Mactavish's words to the convention, "Riel asked whether Mr. Mactavish declared himself the Governor, and on being answered in the negative, remarked brutally, 'it is well he did not, as out of this convention I would have formed a council of war,

³⁵Lepine Trial, p. 80, Sutherland testimony.

³⁶Ibid.; Lepine Trial, pp. 74-75, Xavier Page testimony; Begg's Journal, p. 301; Stanley, Louis Riel, p. 97.

and we would have seen the consequences."³⁷ Riel later adopted the attitude that Mactavish was pleading for the formation of a Provisional Government--"Mr. William Mactavish has asked you, for the sake of God, to form and complete the Provisional Government."³⁸

One writer, referring to the midnight interview, said: "...thus ended the administration in Red River of the Company of Adventurers of England Trading into Hudson's Bay, after a despotic rule of two centuries."³⁹ He is joined by many others, particularly pro-Riel supporters, in interpreting Mactavish's words as some sort of abdication. But as mentioned before, Mactavish's government had been dead since November; it needed only a decent burial, and Mactavish's declaration had merely provided an excuse to the English delegates to acquiesce in forming a Provisional Government, something that had come to be by February 1870 a quite desirable thing.

The next day, Charles Nolin agreed to support the establishment of a second Provisional Government if Mactavish, Cowan and Bannatyne were released.⁴⁰ Riel agreed, and the

³⁷Begg, History of the North-West, I, p.461.

³⁸P.A.M., Riel Papers, 134, Louis Riel to "Fellow Countrymen," Fort Garry, 10 Feb 1870.

³⁹Davidson, Louis Riel, p. 60.

⁴⁰Stanley, Louis Riel, pp. 98-99.

convention thereupon agreed to the establishment of a French-English government. Riel was also able to push through the selection of three delegates of his own choosing to carry the list of demands to the Canadian Government. More important for Riel's ego, he was able over the strident objections of many to force his own election as president of the new provisional government, apparently having forgotten an earlier promise to Bannatyne that that position would be offered to either Mactavish or Black.⁴¹ This done, Riel at the close of the convention on 10 February announced the release of Mactavish, Cowan, and Bannatyne, and of the prisoners captured in Schultz's warehouse and later. The Company's officers were once more allowed to come and go as they pleased.⁴² Mactavish described his release as follows:

Doctor Cowan and myself remained in confinement till the evening of Thursday last, when, about eleven o'clock at night, a man came into my bedroom with the announcement he was about to withdraw the guard and I was at liberty. Doctor Cowan was also permitted to return to his house. The reason assigned was that the Convention had agreed to recognize Riel's government as the established authority in the Country.⁴³

⁴¹Begg's Journal, p. 226.

⁴²United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 154, D.A. Smith to Howe, Ottawa, 12 Apr 1870; New Nation, Friday, 11 Feb 1870.

⁴³A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W.G. Smith, Fort Garry, 12 Feb 1870; soon after releasing Cowan, Riel ordered him to vacate his house in the fort because Riel wanted to use it for the provisional government: Ibid.; Cowan moved down to Lower Fort Garry.

He went on to comment on their general treatment:

The outrages to which the Company's people here have been exposed at the hands of Riel and his people are greater than you probably would believe. His unbridled insolence and violence are of a nature which it would be profitless for me to describe in detail. His imprisonment of Doctor Cowan and myself was doubtless meant to intimidate opposition by holding us as hostages.⁴⁴

The decision announced on 10 February to form a joint English-French provisional government pretty much ended sporadic movements to reinstate Mactavish as the head of government in Red River. The English, as indicated by their statements at the various convention meetings continued all along to support Mactavish's reinstatement. Periodically, there was talk and meetings were held in the Settlement on restoring Mactavish to the head of the government.⁴⁵ And in February, Malmros wrote:

aside from other reasons I believe this all the more as I have been credibly informed that at different times between the date of the surrender of the Canadian party December 7th 1869 and the end of that month, propositions were made to Riel on behalf of a majority of the English speaking population, who are friendly to the H. B. Co. for an active cooperation with the French party on the basis of independence and of receiving a fair share in the management of the Government, particularly insisting on placing Gov. Mactavish at the head of the Executive Department. These propositions were not acceded to by Mr. Riel, or at least he delayed their acceptance sometimes on one sometimes on another pretense showing that he did not

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Begg's Journal, pp. 232, 260, 270.

mean to accept them in good faith....⁴⁶

A group of Settlers in St. John's and Kildonan parishes had met in November, passed a resolution to the effect that the Hudson's Bay Company Government was the only legal one in the country, and adopted a letter to be sent to Mactavish, setting forth:

that the said inhabitants sincerely tender you their sympathy and support in the present critical condition of public affairs, and that they deem the Governor and Council of Assiniboia as constituting the only legal and responsible Government in the country; and will therefore hold the said Governor and Council--acting in behalf of the Hudson's Bay Company, and with the sanction of the Imperial authorities--responsible for any loss of property or injury to person that may take place.⁴⁷

Close reading, of course, reveals that the Settlers of St. John's and Kildonan were less interested in stating their loyalty or reassuring Mactavish than in fixing the liability in case they suffered loss. A meeting attended by about forty people, largely Americans, held on 22 January was less indemnity-conscious. Among other things, they resolved that "it being the opinion of the individuals comprising this meeting, that the restoration by the public of Governor MacTavish to the executive, to be aided by a council, elected by a popular vote" be effected.⁴⁸

⁴⁶P.A.M., United States: Despatches from Consul in Winnipeg, Malmros to J.C.B. Davis, 14 Feb 1870.

⁴⁷Begg, Creation of Manitoba, pp. 127-28.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 243-44.

Even John A. MacDonald had vague hopes for the re-establishment of Mactavish's regime. In mid-February, he sent the following to Taché:

I hope that ere you arrive at Fort Garry, the insurgents, after the explanations that have been entered into by Messrs. Thibault, DeSalaberry and Smith, will have laid down their arms, and allowed Governor McTavish to resume the administration of public affairs. In such case, by the act of the Imperial Parliament of last session, all the public functionaries will still remain in power, and the Council of Assiniboia will be restored to their former position.

As it would be unwise to subject the Government of the Territory to a recurrence of the humiliation already suffered by Governor McTavish, you can inform him /Mactavish/ that if he organizes a local police, of twenty-five men or more, if absolutely necessary, that the expense will be defrayed by the Canadian Government.⁴⁹

But Begg indicated that the talk of restoring Mactavish to the head of the government was not entirely serious, it being generally realized that the state of his health would probably prevent his taking over again under the circumstances.⁵⁰ In any case, such talk seems to have died out with Riel's announcement of 10 February.

Meanwhile, Riel had been slow in releasing the Canadian prisoners whose release he had announced on 10 February, and Canadians and others in Red River and Portage

⁴⁹Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874, p. 19,
John A. MacDonald to Bishop of St. Boniface, Ottawa, 16 Feb
1870.

⁵⁰Begg's Journal, p. 232.

la Prairie became impatient. Mactavish reported that:

On the forenoon of 14th February it became known in Fort Garry that a party of Canadians and others from Portage La Prairie had arrived at Headingly on their way to this place with the avowed object of liberating the prisoners and overthrowing the French party.

Simultaneously with this movement a general rising took place in the lower part of the Settlement, in the parishes of St. Andrew's and St. Clement's, from which a multitude of several hundred men came to Frog Plain, where they were joined by the party of more than one hundred men from the Portage.

Headingly is about twelve miles from Fort Garry, situated on the Assiniboine; Frog Plain is about five miles from Fort Garry, situated on the Red River. In order to form a junction with the party from the Lower Settlement that from the Portage passed within sight of this Fort on the night of the 14th. The moon was bright, and they were expected by the French, who manned the bastions and walls, and fired several shots apparently as a salute. The Portage party, in passing through the village of Winnipeg, surrounded and searched a house in which Riel sometimes slept, though without finding him.

The party from the Lower Settlement was led by Dr. Schultz, and on their arrival at Frog Plain they billeted themselves in the Scotch Church at that place. They sent a messenger to Fort Garry demanding the liberation of the prisoners, which had been promised by Riel on the formation of the Provisional Government, but had been only partially fulfilled. The French party had collected to the number of about seven hundred men, and were prepared to defend the Fort. On the evening of the 15th the last of the prisoners were set at liberty.

After remaining in a disorderly crowd at Frog Plain, debating the best course for them to pursue, the greater number of the English party separated for their various homes on the evening of 16th February.

On the morning of the 17th a number of men belonging to the Portage party passed Fort Garry on their way home from Frog Plain to Portage La Prairie. Riel immediately despatched a party of Frenchmen to intercept them, which was affected without a shot being

fired. The number of prisoners so taken was forty-seven.⁵¹

Before breaking up their forces at Frog Plain, the Canadians and their supporters had succeeded in capturing as a "spy" a demented Métis boy who probably had no connection whatever with the Metis uprising. His subsequent escape resulted in his own death and that of another boy named Hugh Sutherland.

The deaths of Parisien and Sutherland brought a loss of life to two of the three major groups in the Settlement. Riel soon saw to it that the third group was represented also. One of the men captured with the Portage la Prairie party was a Thomas Scott, a rough, excitable Canadian from Perth, Ontario, who had come out to the Settlement with the Snow road party. After being captured this second time (he had also been taken with the Schultz group in Schultz's warehouse, but along with Schultz and some others had escaped), he adopted a policy of insulting his guards which led ultimately to his being tried for insubordination by the semblance of a court-martial. Convicted, he was sentenced to be shot on 4 March. Riel had earlier condemned to death another Canadian, Captain Charles Boulton, the nominal leader of the Portage la Prairie party, but had exchanged Boulton's life for Smith's cooperation in arousing

⁵¹United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, pp. 215-16, Mactavish to W.G. Smith, Fort Garry, 6 Apr 1870.

support in the English parishes for his second provisional government. This time, however, Riel was not to be swayed, and Scott was duly shot on 4 March outside one of the eastern postern gates of Fort Garry.

The execution of "Private T. Scott," as Riel's organ, the New Nation put it, attempting to preserve the fiction that Riel had been condemned by a legitimate military court martial,⁵² seemed to elicit little reaction from Mactavish. Smith said that "Governor McTavish was greatly shocked on being informed of Riel's purpose, and joined in reprobating it,"⁵³ but in commenting on it at the time in a letter to the Company, Mactavish said only: "I also regret to state that a prisoner named Scott was shot by order of a French Court-Martial on 4th March. His offence was, I believe, insubordination."⁵⁴ And in a letter to Howe in May commenting on various aspects of the Rebellion, he mentioned Scott only in connection with Snow: "Mr. Snow himself was about the same time subjected to rough treatment at the hands of a number of his men, who alleged he had cheated them. The leader on this occasion was Thomas Scott whose fate has

⁵²New Nation, Friday, 4 Mar 1870.

⁵³United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 155, D.A. Smith to Howe, Ottawa, 12 Apr 1870.

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 215-17, Mactavish to W.G. Smith, Fort Garry, 6 Apr 1870.

recently excited so much feeling in Canada. He was [convicted?] of the attack on Mr. Snow."⁵⁵ Mactavish undoubtedly regretted the incident, but it would appear that he thought of Scott mainly as one of the Canadian agitators who had been causing so much trouble before and during the Rebellion, one whose agitation finally caught up with him. In any case, he wasted no paper on idle lamentations.

Four days after Scott's killing, Bishop Tache returned to the still quiet Settlement. On his way back to Red River from Rome, he had stopped off at Ottawa to talk with the Canadian officials who had persuaded him to return, and they asked him to reassure the Métis that their rights would be respected. They also gave him a vague promise of a general amnesty. On his arrival in the Settlement, he was for six days prevented from seeing Mactavish by a guard at Mactavish's door.⁵⁶ There is some question of Taché's own freedom of movement, at least for the first few days after his return, leaving some doubt as to whether it was Riel or Taché who was in the ascendency. In any case, Taché's main discoverable influence after his return was in the list of rights to be carried by the three delegates

⁵⁵A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letter from Mactavish to Howe, Fort Garry, 14 May 1870.

⁵⁶Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874, p. 23, Tache testimony.

to Ottawa. Two of the delegates, John Black and Alfred Scott, carried with them a copy not of the list of rights passed by the provisional government, the second list, but a modification amounting to a third list gotten up by Riel and his close associates.⁵⁷ Ritchot carried a fourth list, the difference between the third and fourth being that Ritchot's demanded separate catholic-protestant tax-supported schools.⁵⁸ Though the clause in Ritchot's list was acceded to by the Canadian Government and incorporated into the Manitoba Act, its presence on Ritchot's list of rights did not become widely known until 1874.⁵⁹

The departure of the delegates marked the end of the Rebellion's dynamic period. In the preceding five months, Riel with his persuasiveness and adroit political maneuvering managed to surmount one after the other all local obstacles in his path, even those occasioned by his megalomania. But fundamentally it was a rebellion without purpose, with nowhere to go. Rising spontaneously from hatred for the Canadian Party, it justified itself by demanding "rights." But of the Métis in the Settlement, those participating actively in the uprising were those who would least have

⁵⁷Stanely, Birth of Western Canada, pp. 113-14.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 114.

⁵⁹Ibid.

been concerned with such rights. The backbone of the Rebellion was the tripmen and buffalo hunters, a group more likely to be aroused by anger and frustration than by such abstracts as linguistic and religious "rights." Neither were they the group most to be concerned with land titles; they were primarily not farmers but hunters and oarsmen for the boat brigades. Concern for cultural rights and land titles would most likely have emanated from the settled Métis farmers in Red River, but that group never gave Riel its whole-hearted support. In fact from it came Riel's most determined Métis opposition. Had it depended for support on that group most concerned with its supposed aims, the Rebellion would not have taken place. So it was a rebellion founded on anger, and the anger by March had faded, leaving Riel standing somewhat exposed in his naked vanity.

CHAPTER XII

DEPARTURE

It was a vanity that proved costly to the Company. Riel's policy toward the Company as indicated in his speeches and proclamations had been a consistent one throughout the uprising. He maintained that the Company had sold the Settlers, an idea perhaps inspired by statements circulated in the Settlement by the Canadians in 1863 referring to what the Company had done to its North American officers. Riel went on to proclaim that the Company had no right to sell them, and by doing so had forfeited its right to govern them. This rationalization was his basis for rebelling against the Company's authority, one that no doubt would have been used against Canada's taking over had it been necessary.

Throughout the Rebellion, and openly so after 23 November, Riel treated the government of the Hudson's Bay Company as a nullity, or worse, as a menace to the community. It was convenient for him to do so--justifying him in part for his Rebellion and giving him the semblance of an excuse for relieving the Company of any of its property he wanted. And Riel had given notice early that something like this would be his policy. On 16 November, as already mentioned, Mactavish told London that Riel had protested their maintaining McDougall down near Pembina, and said that "the Company's properties in this Country would be security for any troubles

arising from Mr. McDougall's remaining there."¹ On 22 January, Mactavish wrote that Riel entered Cowan's house and "in the presence of a number of people, a few of whom were opposed to him, violently abused the Hudson Bay Company and its officers, and, among other things, said that the Company must be struck down."² The language of the Métis leaders remained hostile to the Company. Riel stated to Company officers that it was his intention first to crush the Company and then to deal with Canada. Tache's representative, Lestanc, "has also been indulging in similar language,"³ Hargrave reported. The Company's servants were even expelled from their houses and forced to live outside the Fort to provide accommodation for the Métis, though the Company's officers were permitted to retain their homes.⁴ An exception was that of Dr. Cowan, which was taken over by Riel for the use of the provisional government.⁵

¹United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, pp. 185-86, Mactavish to Smith, Fort Garry, 16 Nov 1869.

²Ibid., pp. 205-6, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, 22 Jan 1870.

³P.A.C., MacDonald Papers, Vol 101, Part 2, J. J. Hargrave to Sir Curtis Lampson, Fort Garry, 8 Feb 1870.

⁴Canada: Department of the Secretary of State, Statement of Claims made on the Dominion Government, p. 26, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 6 Apr 1870.

⁵Ibid.

Hargrave summarized the Company's situation on 8 February:

Business is . . . virtually at an end. Two of the Storekeepers still remain in the Fort trying to preserve some remnant of order. The domestic servants have left with the exception of those at the Governors; some of the regular servants are also gone.

Communication being cut off between us & the other posts of the District, I am unable to say more about them than that none are in the enemy's hands. It is however unhappily evident that things generally are likely to become hopelessly disorganized.⁶

Communication with the inland posts was hampered by Riel's ruling that no one could travel without first obtaining a pass from the Métis leaders to present to Métis scouts stationed on all the roads.⁷ In February, Chief Factors Campbell and Stewart, who later according to Isaac Cowie were trying to work up an expedition to recapture Fort Garry, visited the Settlement, having probably come up the Red River:

The former did not enter Fort Garry, but sent me a message to meet him at the Company's house in the neighboring village of Winnipeg. He was extremely anxious about many points. He confirmed the current report that the members of the Romish priesthood in the Western Plain Districts are urging the Winterers with much vehemence to come here in the spring to fight the invaders. He expressed great uneasiness in view of a possible attack on some of his posts in Swan River District, more

⁶P.A.C., MacDonald Papers, Vol 101, Part 2, J. J. Hargrave to Lampson, Fort Garry, 8 Feb 1870.

⁷Canada: Statement of Claims Made on the Dominion Government, p. 26, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 6 Apr 1870.

especially Qu'Appelle, where there is a large supply of provisions.⁸

Stewart came no closer than Lower Fort Garry.

Mactavish feared that the Métis would in the spring begin operations against the interior posts, which at the very least would have delayed getting the returns to York in time to go home by the ship.⁹ At worst, the forts and returns could have been seized and confiscated. In either case, the result to the Company's business would have been ruinous.¹⁰ Fortunately, the main interior posts, and most of the minor ones, though threatened much during the Rebellion, suffered little.¹¹

But though the Company lost little to the Métis in the outlying districts, it fared less well in the Red River area. Throughout the winter Riel had been plundering the Company's stores unmercifully. Mactavish wrote when the Métis first occupied Fort Garry that "they give assurances that nothing will be touched and nothing taken. For what

⁸P.A.C., MacDonald Papers, Vol 101, Part 2, J. J. Hargrave to Lampson, Fort Garry, 8 Feb 1870.

⁹Canada: Statement of Claims made on the Dominion Government, p. 26, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 6 Apr 1870.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹The explosive situation at Qu'Appelle was described well by Cowie, Company of Adventurers.

provisions they require, they offer to pay in the name of the 'Council of the Republic of the Half-breeds.'"¹² A week later, a letter from Mactavish to McDougall said:

On coming into the Fort they earnestly disclaimed all intention of injuring either person or property within it--and it must be allowed that in that respect they have kept their word; but it is an inconvenience and a danger, next to intolerable, to have a body of armed men, even with professions of peace toward ourselves, forcibly billeted upon an establishment such as this.¹³

By the following week the picture had changed: "and, though the men generally are quiet and orderly, and evidently unwilling to give offence, it appears to me that Riel himself is not inclined to be so civil." Mactavish went on to say that Riel had demanded "the keys of two Bastions containing some muskets--which he made to Chief Trader [sic] Cowan some nights previously--and said that this showed "that he, at least, would proceed to considerable lengths."¹⁴

The situation deteriorated rapidly. On 11 December, Mactavish wrote:

When Louis Riel, with a party of armed men, first occupied this establishment, Doctor Cowan, under protest, supplied them with daily food, under the belief that if

¹²United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 187, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 2 Nov 1869.

¹³Ibid., pp. 37-39, Mactavish to McDougall, Fort Garry, 9 Nov 1869.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 185-86, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 16 Nov 1869.

they once commenced to break into stores to supply their wants there would be no end to it. I did not agree on this subject, but, as the arrangement was made, I thought it better to follow the course agreed on for a time; but, so soon as I was able to speak to them, I got the leaders together, and pointed out to them that to persevere in the course they had taken was ruin to themselves and ordered them to leave this establishment, refusing to allow anything whatever to be supplied them from the Stores. At a Meeting held afterwards by them on this subject, I am told the Rev. M. Richot, one of the Roman Catholic priests here, urged them to hold out, alleging that their case was already before the Canadians, that the Ministry would fall, and that the demands of the Red River people would be granted and their rights secured. They decided on not dispersing, and, after some hesitation, broke open one of our Stores and took provisions and some bags of ball out of it on 4 December. Subsequently Riel entered the shop and took about ten common Indian guns which were there, and on the following day he broke into another Store, and took seven Indian guns from it. Since then he has cleared all the Stores of the merchants in the village of Winnipeg of all their guns and ammunition.¹⁵

On the evening of 17 December, Riel came in and asked Mactavish for the loan of about one thousand pounds to the Provisional Government. "I, of course, pointed out to him that the Government he alluded to was not a Government, but simply a body of men supported by a section of a section of the people of the country."¹⁶ Mactavish went on to say that "I had from the beginning pointed out to him that the steps he was taking were unnecessary as well as illegal, and could eventually only lead to the injury of the people he had

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 190-91, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 11 Dec 1869.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 201-2, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, 25 Dec 1869.

induced to support him."¹⁷ Two members of the Métis "Council" came back on the 20th formally to demand a loan for the Provisional Government. Mactavish again refused. On 22 December they returned, asking for 10,000 pounds, and got another refusal. But this time before they left Riel "made a threatening speech, informing me the Company had abused and kept down the half-breeds, and ended by selling them with the country, and that it was full time the half-breeds got their redress."¹⁸ Riel then went to J. H. McTavish, the accountant, and demanded the money from him. McTavish refused. Riel and his men searched McTavish and found the keys on one of his pockets. McTavish still refused to tell them the secret of opening the safe, however, and the Métis had so much trouble opening it they at one time threatened to blow it up. They finally got it opened, counted the money, then took both money and safe away with them.¹⁹ Its contents consisted of 1,090 pounds and 4 shillings, of which 262 pounds was in old Company notes, tied up as cancelled, and 757 pounds in Company promissory notes, the rest being in American currency and gold and silver coins.²⁰ Apparently 550 pounds of the money

¹⁷Ibid. ¹⁸Ibid. ¹⁹Begg's Journal, p. 237.

²⁰United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 199, Sir Stafford Northcote to Sir Frederick Rogers, 25 Jan 1870; Ibid., pp. 201-2 Mactavish to W. G. Smith, 25 Dec 1869.

was used to pay off William Coldwell for his newspaper, The Pioneer, whose first and last issue before being taken over by Riel had been the one printing Mactavish's proclamation.²¹ Mactavish reported that as a result of the safe robbery he had:

given up redeeming Hudson's Bay promissory notes here. On the face of all notes they are declared redeemable only at York Factory, and we had better adhere to that, as we would find that the business could only be carried on under the surveillance of an armed guard, who would take possession of the notes so soon as they were in our hands.²²

The plundering continued into January.²³ Near the end of that month, according to J. J. Hargrave, "one of Riel's leading men violently wrested from the hand of Dr. Cowan the key of the Sale Shop, which they have since retained, excluding those who are legally entitled to enter it, & distributing the goods among their people."²⁴ Hargrave went on to say

²¹J. W. Dafoe, "Early Winnipeg Newspapers," Papers of Manitoba Historical Society, Series III, No. 3, 1947, p. 16; Begg's Journal, pp. 195-96; Begg went on to infer that the supposition that the newspaper was bought with Company money was unfounded, but he did not convincingly dispose of the supposition.

²²United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, pp. 201-2, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, 25 Dec 1869.

²³Ibid., p. 205, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 10 Jan 1870.

²⁴P.A.C., MacDonal Papers, Vol 101, Part 2, J. J. Hargrave to Lampson, Fort Garry, 8 Feb 1870.

that "all the Stores and Warehouses with the exception of that most valuable one in which the outfits for Inland Districts are stored are now in the undisputed possession of these people, & doubtless as soon as they require it they will possess themselves of the remaining key."²⁵ Hargrave also feared the Métis would seize a consignment of thirty-five thousand pounds worth of furs that had been stored at Fort Garry because they could not be shipped the preceding autumn.²⁶ Malmros wrote a month later that they had indeed taken charge of the furs, holding them "as a kind of security for the good conduct of the company and also I presume to force the company into loans of money to the Government."²⁷

Plundering from another quarter took place early in February. A party of Métis led by William Dease who were supposedly opposed to Riel and professed friendship to the Company broke into the Company's store in St. Boniface, imprisoned the storekeeper and looted the premises.²⁸

It was, in fact, a hard winter for the Hudson's Bay Company's stores. At least seventy of the Company's cattle

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷P.A.M., United States: Despatches from Consuls in Winnipeg, Malmros to J. C. B. Davis, 12 Mar 1870.

²⁸P.A.C., MacDonald Papers, Vol 101, Part 2, J. J. Hargrave to Lampson, Fort Garry, 8 Feb 1870.

had been killed to feed the insurgents, a valuable shipment of furs had been seized, and the keys to all the Company's shops, stores, and warehouses had been taken over by the Métis, who had "for months past been carrying away the Company's property of all kinds in vast quantities without let or hindrance."²⁹ This policy even extended to the more liquid staples of life:

. . . Riel's men would go down into the Hudson Bay Company's cellar, with pitchers and small pails, and would not take the time to draw the Hudson Bay rum by way of the taps, but would break the heads off the barrels and dip their vessels in the rum and walk away. He said the Governor of the Company and officers were in great fear that in their excitement from drinking the strong spirits that they might in their frenzy do something dreadful or perhaps kill some of the prisoners. It was indeed an anxious time for the Company's officers.³⁰

Hargrave feared that "under the pretence of acting as soldiers," the Métis would consume the Company's entire stores.³¹ Alexander Begg said that "the pillage went on to such an extent that the account kept at first of the goods taken had at last to be abandoned, and finally no regular

²⁹Canada: Statement of Claims made on the Dominion Government, p. 26, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 6 Apr 1870; Begg, Creation of Manitoba, p. 299.

³⁰O'Donnell, Manitoba as I saw it, p. 111.

³¹p.A.C., MacDonal Papers, Vol 101, Part 2, J. J. Hargrave to Lampson, Fort Garry, 8 Feb 1870.

record was kept."³² Begg called it "Barefaced robbery."³³ Supporters of the Métis often referred to it as "loans."³⁴ One determined apologist called it "a form of taxation."³⁵

This "taxation" made it all the more difficult for the Métis to get support from the English-speaking part of the Settlement,³⁶ but there are indications that it did not bother Mactavish excessively. Sometime before mid-December he wrote: "Only I strongly advise you to risk nothing for the greedy London Directory, from whom we are not likely to receive any thanks, but who will themselves receive full compensation for the stores, etc."³⁷ Mactavish at this time was still incensed by what he regarded as an insulting letter from the Company explaining to him that he should cooperate with the new government.³⁸

Plundering, in fact, was probably a necessary aspect of Riel's policy. Not only did it keep his Métis supporters fed, but his spoils system was probably the main thing that

³²Begg, Creation of Manitoba, p. 296. ³³Ibid., p. 198

³⁴Dugas, Le Mouvement des Métis, p. 165.

³⁵Robert E. Lamb, Thunder in the North (New York, 1957), p. 25.

³⁶Begg, Creation of Manitoba, p. 198.

³⁷Willson, Life of Lord Strathcona, pp. 263-65.

³⁸A.H.B.C., A.7/4, Northcote to Mactavish, London, 19 Oct 1869.

kept his force together through the winter after the first blush of patriotic fervor faded. As O'Donnell pointed out, being in possession of the stores, Riel "could deal out rum, brandy and wine, dry goods and all sorts of provisions to them ad libitum, and his influence would hold out as long as long as the supplies did."³⁹

But if it was easy enough for Riel to dominate and pillage the Hudson's Bay Company during the winter, approaching spring changed the situation. The Settlement, English-speaking and French-speaking members alike, still depended on the Company for its economic livelihood. By March, the English-speaking Settlers, particularly the merchants, were openly complaining of the delay in re-establishing the Company as a business.⁴⁰ Particularly was the shortage of money felt. Merchants and farmers alike were drastically affected by the Company's paralysis, the merchants needing money circulating, the farmers needing a market for their produce.⁴¹

Additional pressure on Riel came from his own Métis, particularly his active supporters. They could afford to act the part of soldiers during the winter, particularly since they were subsidized and probably would not have been working

³⁹O'Donnell, Manitoba as I saw It, pp. 42-43.

⁴⁰Begg's Journal, pp. 346-47.

⁴¹Begg, History of the North-West, I, p. 479.

anyway, but if the Company was not doing business in the spring there would be no one to hire them for the boat and cart brigades. Rebellion, it seems, would be supported or tolerated only so long as it was not costly or inconvenient.

Riel therefore had to put the Company back in business without prematurely losing control of the supplies that kept his force from falling apart. Sometime during the first half of March, he presented to Mactavish what amounted to an ultimatum. He demanded that: (1) the Company recognize the Provisional Government; (2) the Company loan the Provisional Government three thousand pounds sterling; (3) the Company loan the Provisional Government another two thousand pounds sterling if trouble developed with Canada over the negotiations; (4) the Company donate four thousand pounds worth of provisions to the Provisional Government for its "military" operations; (5) the Company immediately put their currency back in circulation; (6) the Company allow the Provisional Government to retain certain other goods, vaguely specified, in the Company's store.⁴² In return, Riel would allow the Company to resume business, return Fort Garry and the Company's supplies to its control, and promise there would be no more trouble either there or at posts in the inland districts.

He seemed to be in no hurry, however. Mactavish,

⁴²New Nation, Friday, 2 Apr 1870; Begg, History of the North-West, 1, p. 479.

writing to Taché on 18 March, said:

I have not seen President Riel yet, and am anxious to know whether he is keeping off till I write him, or is just waiting till he has time to see me. Should I write to him and beg him to come and see me, as I have long made up my mind, on the point he and I last spoke. I know I have before given him offense by asking him to come to me, and I don't want to do that. At the same time no feeling of ill-time vanity has interfered with my asking him now. A mere hint for me to open communication with him or not will suffice. But I would prefer agreeing to the loan personally, as thought in the first instance, and I would like at the same time to speak to him about his communications for Fort Ellice and other posts. I am afraid you will have difficulty in reading this scrawl.

Hoping you will excuse my troubling you to-day and all days, believe me, with very sincere feelings of gratitude
⁴³

Mactavish seemed to feel he had no choice but to accede to Riel's demands. As he wrote to the Company: "The conditions bear very heavily upon us, but compliance was inevitable."⁴⁴ The threat held over Mactavish's head was that of a general Métis plundering of the Company's posts throughout the inland districts: "Our returns throughout the North would have been seized and appropriated by the French, and Forts would have been taken, and our people, cast adrift in the country, would have been compelled to shift for themselves as best they could." Furthermore, public opinion was on Riel's side. The

⁴³Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874, pp.26-27, Tache Testimony.

⁴⁴Canada: Statement of Claims made on the Dominion Government, p. 26, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 6 Apr 1870.

widespread desire on the part of the Settlement for a return to business normalcy exerted pressure on Mactavish to meet Riel's demands or risk the ill-will of the Settlement.⁴⁵

Mactavish signed the agreement on 5 April 1870, with his signature being witnessed by Thomas Bunn and William O'Donoghue.⁴⁶ The same day, Bunn notified Mactavish that two thousand to two thousand five hundred pounds worth of the supplies the contract called for would be in provisions, the rest in merchandise.⁴⁷ Riel's men then went to work appropriating the goods the contract allowed them, along with the goods confiscated from Schultz's warehouse in December.⁴⁸ This done, Riel gave up the keys to the warehouses and the Company began taking a long inventory lasting until it reopened its stores on 27 April.⁴⁹ Riel, the day after turning over the keys, had issued a proclamation declaring peace, the opening of the public highways, and the Provisional Government's permission to the Company to resume business.⁵⁰

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Canada: Statement of Claims made on the Dominion Government, p. 30.

⁴⁷Ibid.; A.H.B.C., D.9/1, Bunn to Mactavish, 5 Apr 1870.

⁴⁸Begg, Creation of Manitoba, p. 336. ⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 127; Riel Proclamation to the people of the North-West, n.d.

But peace continued to be expensive. It was not long before Riel had gone through the first three thousand pounds and was demanding and getting the two thousand to be provided in case of trouble with Canada.⁵¹ The Company resumed printing its bills of exchange on 3 May.⁵² O'Donoghue brought a one pound Hudson's Bay Company note to the New Nation office and asked that it be duplicated. About five thousand pounds worth of them were printed, signed by J. H. McTavish, and put in circulation.⁵³

All this added up to a good deal of damage to the Hudson's Bay Company financially, and the Company was not shy about asserting its claims. First of all, the Company claimed five per cent per annum interest on the three hundred thousand pounds that was supposed to have been paid over to it by the Canadian Government by 1 December but which was not paid over until 11 May 1870.⁵⁴ The Company also asked for reimbursement of the "ransom" paid in money and goods to Riel, for damage to its buildings, and for the goods stolen by the Métis from the

⁵¹Begg's Journal, p. 559.

⁵²Begg, Creation of Manitoba, pp. 345-46.

⁵³Ibid.; P.A.M., Winship Account, Chap VIII, p. 19.

⁵⁴Canada: Statement of Claims made on the Dominion Government, pp. 50-51, Northcote to Rogers, London, 1 Nov 1870; United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, pp. 198-99, Northcote to Young, London, 22 Jan 1870.

Company.⁵⁵

The Company also asked for help from the British Colonial Office in pressing its claim, taking the position that the negotiations for the transfer had been handled through there.⁵⁶ The Colonial Office, however, took the stand that they had been nothing more than innocent bystanders in the transfer negotiations, merely making suggestions now and then to help things along. They declined to accept any liability for the Company's losses, declined to help the Company press its claims against Canada, and told the Company it would have to deal directly with Canada itself.⁵⁷

But Canada, it turned out, was at least as innocent as the Colonial Office. As Alexander Begg put it, "Canada . . . determined upon following a fair and upright course towards all classes, and went nobly to work in the good cause. She repudiated the illegal acts committed by men who had usurped her authority."⁵⁸ Begg's intent here may not have been sarcasm, but perhaps it might have been. Not only

⁵⁵Canada: Statement of Claims made on the Dominion Government, p. 40, Northcote to Howe, London, 29 Nov 1870.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Canada: Statement of Claims made on the Dominion Government, pp. 51-52, Holland to Northcote, London, 21 Nov 1870.

⁵⁸Begg, Creation of Manitoba, p. 395.

did the Canadian Government disavow the actions of McDougall's representatives in the Settlement, particularly their business transactions, and absolve itself of any liability for the Company's claims, but they set themselves up as protectors of the Métis in case the Company was for some reason to press its claims against that poverty-ridden group:

Should the question arise as to the consumption of any stores or goods belonging to the Hudson's Bay Company by the insurgents, you are authorized to inform the leaders that if the Company's Government is restored, not only will there be a general amnesty granted; but in case the Company should claim the payment for such stores, that the Canadian Government will stand between the insurgents and all harm.⁵⁹

The nobility of these sentiments was probably lost on the Company, which subsequently set its losses at Red River at 30,843 pounds.⁶⁰ This did not include the claim for interest on the purchase money. Canada, in 1884, after fourteen years of litigation, finally paid the Company 10,704 pounds in settlement.⁶¹ The Rebellion had cost them something over 20,000 pounds. But at the same time, the joint British-Canadian military expedition sent to Red River in 1870 was to cost England 100,000 pounds and Canada 300,000 pounds.⁶²

⁵⁹Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874, p. 19, Tache testimony.

⁶⁰A.H.B.C., E.9/1, Statement of loss and damage sustained by the Hudson's Bay Company at Red River, in consequence of the occupation of Fort Garry by the French halfbreeds 1969/70; this calculation was made in October 1870.

⁶¹Douglas MacKay, The Honourable Company (New York, 1936), p. 298.

⁶²Young, Manitoba Memories, p. 192.

After closing the deal with Riel, Mactavish made plans to send about eight boats instead of the usual fifteen to Portage la Loche, presumably with their yearly supplies. He also made ready to send to St. Paul as soon as possible the furs stored at Fort Garry that had been seized and returned by Riel. An attempt was to be made to carry on the summer trade as usual, "but in consequence of the dreadful pillage we have sustained we shall do so in a very crippled condition."⁶³ Mactavish had hopes of obtaining many badly needed articles from St. Paul, however.⁶⁴

Mactavish in fact had done his best during the winter to manage the Company's business matters. In May, he wrote a long business letter to the Company assuring it that, though he had been writing and acknowledging correspondence relatively infrequently, he still had been attending to the fur trade:

The state of my health, combined with the excitement of a political nature which has prevailed throughout the winter, has prevented me from corresponding with you as regularly as I could have wished. . . . but I may assure you that nothing has been lost sight of, and that all the various matters in your letters, whether immediately answered or not, have been noted, and as far as possible, attended to.⁶⁵

⁶³Canada: Statement of Claims made on the Dominion Government, p. 26; Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 6 Apr 1870.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 16 May 1870.

One item of particular importance that had to be dealt with during the winter was the matter of the Red River Indent, the yearly requisition for supplies. Mactavish delayed sending it to London at first because he wanted to await the outcome of Smith's mission.⁶⁶ On the Company's specifically asking for the indent, Mactavish finally sent it, but said that he did so against his better judgment. "I hope to address you at greater length on this subject in the course of a few mails," he went on, "when it is to be hoped they will be exposed to less risk of inspection than is now the case."⁶⁷ Early in April, he wrote: "Meanwhile I may say I consider the position of the Company in this country to be most critical, and I cannot advise the Board to allow any fresh importations of merchandise until some guarantee shall have been obtained from the English or Canadian Governments for our protection."⁶⁸

The Company immediately went to work to try to get such a guarantee, but with little success. Pointing out to the Colonial Office that the time had come to send out the yearly

⁶⁶P.A.C., MacDonald Papers, Vol 101, Part 2, J. J. Hargrave to Lampson, Fort Garry, 8 Feb 1870.

⁶⁷A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 18 Mar 1870.

⁶⁸Canada: Statement of Claims made on the Dominion Government, p. 26, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 6 Apr 1870.

stores, worth about 80,000 pounds, the Company asked the Colonial Office if the British Government would guarantee them against loss if the loss occurred as a result of the Rebellion.⁶⁹ The Colonial Office replied that by the time the supplies arrived the territory would be under the jurisdiction of Canada, so the Company should apply for a guarantee from Canada.⁷⁰ The Company said that it was too late to do so.⁷¹ It was just as well. The Company later applied to the Canadian Government for a guarantee but was told that the Canadian Government disclaimed "any responsibility for the acts of the self-styled Provisional Government of the Red River Territory."⁷² The Company told the Colonial Office that it would ship the supplies anyway and look to the British Government for compensation if it suffered loss.⁷³ The Colonial Office said the Company need not bother seeking compensation from them since they would accept no liability for any loss.⁷⁴ Fortunately, no loss was incurred.

⁶⁹Ibid., pp. 25-26, Lampson to Rogers, 13 May 1870.

⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 30-31, Holland to Lampson, London, 17 May 1870.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 31, Lampson to Holland, London, 20 May 1870.

⁷²Ibid., pp. 39-40, Report of a Committee of the Honorable the Privy Council, approved by Governor General on 1 Jul 1870.

⁷³Ibid., p. 31, Lampson to Holland, London, 20 May 1870.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 31, Rogers to Lampson, London, 26 May 1870.

In May, Mactavish was directed by the Company to appoint Chief Factor Hamilton, of Cumberland District, in charge of Red River District. Mactavish objected for several reasons, one of which was that Hamilton was needed in Cumberland District. Another reason was he thought J. H. Mactavish under the circumstances would be better for the job:

On the Company's resumption of business at Fort Garry a few weeks ago, for a variety of reasons, on a consideration of which it is needless here to enter, I found it advisable to relieve Chief Factor Cowan from the nominal charge of the district, which I intrusted to Mr. John H. Mactavish, a clerk of fourteen years standing in the service, who for the last ten years has filled the very responsible position of Accountant at this place.

As an inducement to Mr. Mactavish to exert himself in the very unpleasant duty of getting our business here into order amidst the humiliating circumstances with which we were surrounded, I promised him the exertion of my utmost influence to obtain the confirmation of his appointment to the charge during the coming Outfit.

He has very creditably fulfilled the duties connected with his charge so far, and we are fast getting into running order. The appointment I find is also very popular in the district. Moreover the tact shown by Mr. Mactavish in his dealings with the halfbreeds during the past winter has been very considerable; and I doubt not we owe to his management the permission to retain occupation of our public office and the preservation of our books and papers.⁷⁵

Mactavish was duly appointed officer in charge of Fort Garry, a concession that demonstrated the Company's continuing approval of Mactavish's management of affairs. It had stated

⁷⁵A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to Northcote, Fort Garry, 16 May 1870; see also Ibid., Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 3 May 1870.

this approval on several occasions during the Rebellion.

While McDougall was still at Pembina, they wrote:

The Governor and Committee . . . express in the strongest terms their cordial approval of the judicious advice you tendered to Mr. Macdougall and their sympathy with you in being placed in a most difficult and trying condition at a time when the state of your health was unable to bear the excitement which this outbreak must have caused.⁷⁶

Later in December, they tendered their full approval of Mactavish's course of action, saying they hoped he would succeed in settling the affair without using force "and above all without a collision between the different sections of the population in the Settlement, feeling assured that the effects of any such collision would be very disastrous to the future prosperity of the country."⁷⁷ And as the ordeal neared its end, and the Company heard that Mactavish was leaving for England soon, Sir Stafford Northcote, the Governor of the Company, wrote:

In the meantime they desire me to assure you that they have warmly appreciated your conduct throughout the troubles at the Red River under the very difficult circumstances in which you were placed and in particular to convey to you their best thanks for your prudence in preventing collisions which might easily have taken place between different sections of the community and which would in all probability have led to highly disastrous consequences.⁷⁸

⁷⁶A.H.B.C., A.6/43, W. G. Smith to Mactavish, London, 11 Dec 1869.

⁷⁷Ibid., W. G. Smith to Mactavish, 31 Dec 1869.

⁷⁸A.H.B.C., A.7/4, Northcote to Mactavish, London, 19 Jul 1870.

But in the meantime the trials of the winter had pressured Mactavish into a decision he had long contemplated --on 15 January he wrote a letter of resignation, to take effect on 31 May 1870:

For some time past my health has been so broken, that I have had at times great difficulty in attending to my duties. Latterly it has failed me altogether and at this time I am so feeble as to be unfit for business of any kind, as I am still becoming weaker and weaker--I have no doubt that before spring I will be unfit for any exertion whatever, under these circumstances it would be useless to remain in your service and I have on retirement and that my connexion with the Company will cease with the close of the current outfit.⁷⁹

There is obviously something wrong with the last clause or two. Judging by this and other correspondence, Mactavish during the winter suffered from periods of lessened coherency.

Sir Stafford Northcote replied for the Committee:

It is, I assure you, with great reluctance and very great regret that the Committee have brought themselves to accept your resignation of the post of Governor. Under any circumstances we should have lamented the retirement of one who has done the Company so much good service, and to whom it is under so much obligation. Our regret is enhanced by the consideration that the step is rendered necessary by the state of your health, and by the apprehension that the very trying circumstances in which you have of late been placed must have materially added to your sufferings.

You have already been assured of the satisfaction of the Committee with your proceedings at the earlier stage of the present troubles, and I may add that they have

⁷⁹A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to Gov, Dep Gov, and Comm, Fort Garry, 15 Jan 1870.

every reason to retain their conviction that you acted with judgment and discretion, and that they would have been prepared to continue their confidence in you had you felt yourself physically able to remain at your post.

The Board at their last meeting decided on granting you a years leave of absence, and they desired me to express their hope that you may be able to retain your connection with the Company at its expiration, but to add that should you prefer to retire from it altogether they will place your name on the retired list.

I take this opportunity of expressing my own sincere regret that you should have been pained by the letter which I wrote to you in the Autumn respecting the future relation of the Company to the Canadian Government. Nothing was further from my thoughts than the idea that such a letter was necessary for your own guidance. It was written simply for the purpose of putting on record the desire of the Committee to act corially with the Government.⁸⁰

The rebellion had, of course, done nothing to restore Mactavish's health. As early as November 1869, his early death was being predicted. A. W. E. Stanford, writing to Joseph Howe in that month, said that Mactavish was failing rapidly and that he would "not be surprised to hear of his death by any mail."⁸¹ Except for periodic slight recoveries,⁸² Mactavish remained critically ill through the winter, confined

⁸⁰A.H.B.C., A.7/4, Northcote to Mactavish, London, 12 Mar 1870; A.H.B.C., A.6/43, W. G. Smith to Mactavish, London, 12 Mar 1870.

⁸¹Canada: Correspondence and Papers Connected with Recent Occurrences in the North-West Territories, W. E. Sanford to Howe, Hamilton, 18 Nov 1869.

⁸²Begg's Journal, p. 183.

much of the time to his bed⁸³ and "nightly coughing much blood."⁸⁴ Alexander Begg, referring to mid-December, said:

During all this time, Governor MacTavish, who was in a decline remained very ill in his house, being only able at times to move from his bed; and the events occurring in the Settlement tended to make him a great deal worse than he otherwise might have been.⁸⁵

And apparently his correspondence from the Company continued to detract from his peace of mind:

I have to inform you that your letter of 5 Feby reached me a day or two ago & it appears to me you do not see the dangerous state in the Companys business is in, and you do seem to know I am & have been so ill & weak as it appears to me I have found myself--my services are to tell you the plain truth illegible, but something like "not sounds have no meaning".⁸⁶

As the long winter wore on, Mactavish made plans to leave the Settlement early in the spring if he were strong enough to be moved. There remained a question, though, whether he would live till spring.⁸⁷ Even Mactavish himself said later that he had felt during the winter as if he were at death's door.⁸⁸ But as the weather warmed, he improved

⁸³P.A.M., United States: Despatches from Consuls in Winnipeg, Malmros to J. C. B. Davis, 14 Feb 1870.

⁸⁴MacKay, Honourable Company, p. 296.

⁸⁵Begg, Creation of Manitoba, p. 183.

⁸⁶A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 13 Mar 1870.

⁸⁷Ibid., pp. 322, 324.

⁸⁸A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letter from Mactavish to Howe, Fort Garry, 14 May 1870.

somewhat. By April, he was able to climb stairs and go outside to walk around a little on the platform before his door.⁸⁹ He continued to improve throughout the month. And in May, the New Nation said: "It has been with great pleasure that the public generally has seen the old gentleman, on various occasions within the past few weeks, sufficiently recovered to be driven short distances beyond the walls of the Fort."⁹⁰

Sarah Mactavish apparently had stayed with her husband at Fort Garry throughout the uprising. Various visitors to Mactavish's house in the fort mention talking with her there and on one occasion at least, during the time Mactavish and Cowan were held prisoner, she refused an offer of Bannatyne and one of her brothers to leave the fort and live at her father's for a while.⁹¹

And his brother-in-law, A. G. B. Bannatyne, remained in constant contact with Mactavish the whole time, keeping him accurately posted on events, relaying messages for him, and even asking his advice. Bannatyne at one time was thinking of quitting his job as postmaster because he did not want to be associated with Riel, but at the same time he did not want the job to fall into the hands of the pro-Riel Americans who were

⁸⁹Begg's Journal, p. 356.

⁹⁰New Nation, Friday, 29 May 1870.

⁹¹Begg's Journal, pp. 297-98.

pushing for the job, so Bannatyne decided to discuss it with Mactavish. Alexander Begg said:

The Governor told him that, if he though it would do any good, each and every man ought to do all in their powers, to keep peace amongst the people; and under the circumstances, as the Council of Assiniboia [sic] had been rendered powerless, he did not see that any harm, but perhaps much good could result from holding on to the office, although it was a delicate step to take at that time, for he said, while your motives may be good, it is doubtful whether the world will give you that much credit.⁹²

Bannatyne decided to stay, but Mactavish was partly right.

Bannatyne's retaining his job as postmaster, plus his efforts to act as mediator between various factions in the Settlement, earned for him some accusations of having been in sympathy with the Rebellion.

As Mactavish prepared to leave, he composed a long letter to Joseph Howe commenting on various aspects of the Rebellion and the events leading up to it, concentrating particularly on William McDougall, whose correspondence he had just seen through the publication by the Canadian Government of some key correspondence relating to the Rebellion.⁹³ He left no doubt where he placed the ultimate blame for the uprising. While condemning the policy of the Canadian Government in the transfer, and deploring the fact that "civil

⁹²Begg, Creation of Manitoba, pp. 202-3.

⁹³A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letter from Mactavish to Howe, Fort Garry, 14 May 1870; much of this letter has already been presented one way or another, particularly in the chapters on McDougall and the fall of Fort Garry.

disorder should have been excited in the colony through official mismanagement," Mactavish still held the Imperial Government primarily at fault:

But, while taking exception to the illegible of Canada, illegible not forget that the prime source of the evils under which we now suffer lies in England. Repeatedly during the past nine years have memorials been addressed to the Colonial office both by the Hudson's Bay Company and the inhabitants of this settlement setting forth the unprotected condition of the colony against perils from without, as well as the inability of an unsupported magistracy to maintain order within. To such representations the Imperial authorities have been deaf. The consequence has been our continuous exposure to the dangerous possibilities rising from Indian wars and a mixture of race and creeds.⁹⁴

Continuing on the subject of the failure to send troops, he said:

One of the results of this has been the dearth of British sympathy among our population and the steady expectation which the succeeding years have only confirmed that the inevitable destiny of this country was politically linked with the United States of America, which at present supply us with our only connection with civilization, by mails & freight routes.

To those on the spot, this condition of things is of course not new, and to the outside world these symptoms now seem at last to have become apparent. The spectacle of British subjects from a sister colony forced to fly for refuge to a foreign state, while professing Fenians and annexation sympathizers dominate in a settlement nominally British: of authorities recognized by the Crown, insulted and repulsed by a revolutionary government, while the bearers of unmatured commissions from the source of all British power are described as "skulking" about the environs of a colony of the Empire while it renders the English name a jest on the continent; ought at last to illegible the Government to a tardy sense of the wrong it has done.

⁹⁴Ibid.

I write so strongly because I deeply feel the errors which have been committed by all parties. Their efforts have already been unmistakably apparent in the miseries of the past winter, which as far as I am concerned have exceeded the combined troubles of all the other thirty-six winters I have passed in the territory.⁹⁵

Mactavish even took time to try to correct a still-persisting tendency in Canadian official and historical circles to exaggerate the role of the United States in the Red River Rebellion:

To the authorities in the United States the condition of partial anarchy in which we have so long existed, has been a felt evil, in consequence of the facilities offered to their dangerous classes for obtaining a near asylum from the illegible of justice. Hostile Indians and deserters from the American Army, with their stolen booty have only had to cross our borders to be safe. I cannot permit this opportunity to pass without acknowledging the consideration shown us in such cases by at least the superior officials of the States. The American Government has been a good deal accused of entertaining a desire to precipitate the annexation of this territory. Had it desired to do so it has undoubtedly enjoyed, among the last decade, unlimited opportunities and some provocation for the attempt.⁹⁶

Mactavish was tampering with a practice that was not to be undone by mere fact, however.

By 1 May, Mactavish had so far recovered that Alexander Begg reported there was talk of his leaving by the first or second boat.⁹⁷ Two days later he said Mactavish was expected to leave by the second boat.⁹⁸ The Hudson's Bay Company

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Begg's Journal, p. 365.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 366.

steamer "International" arrived in the Settlement on 4 May on its first trip of the season.⁹⁹ It took on a large cargo of furs, and left the next day for Georgetown, in Minnesota, to return immediately to take Mactavish away.¹⁰⁰ Meanwhile a question arose as to whether Riel would let Mactavish leave.¹⁰¹ Mactavish paid a visit to Riel, however, and apparently received Riel's permission.¹⁰²

On 17 May, the "International" started on her second trip of the year up the Red River. On board were Governor Mactavish and his family. Alexander Begg described the departure:

A number of people went to the landing, to see them off, and a short time before the hour of starting the Governor drove down to the bank of the river, and there alighted, being assisted by Mr. Hargrave, his Secretary, and Mr. J. H. McTavish, the accountant of the Fort. All were shocked at the feeble appearance of the good old man, reduced as he was almost to a skeleton. Resting on his walking stick, he tottered slowly toward the steamer, every now and again casting his eyes around as if bidding farewell to the scenes of so many years of labor.¹⁰³

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Those who watched the departure of Governor MacTavish were deeply touched at the sight of a man who had given his life, as it were, for the country, leaving it in the state he was, enfeebled and broken down,--a wreck of manhood,--brought on, as it was well known, through his

⁹⁹Ibid., pp. 366-67.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., pp. 366-67

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 370.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 371.

¹⁰³Begg, History of the North-West, I, pp. 485-86.

hard work and anxiety in behalf of the country and those living in it.¹⁰⁴

After Mactavish got on board, the gangways were taken up. A thin, penetrating rain began to fall, and a strong wind arose that gave the "International" trouble in getting away from her moorings, but it was not long before the steamer moved out of sight around a bend in the river.¹⁰⁵

The New Nation in its next issue said:

We feel that this announcement will be read, from one end of this country to the other, with profound regret; as it is useless to conceal the well-known fact, that Mr. Mactavish's departure on the present occasion is final, the state of his health permitting no hope to be entertained of his returning amongst us to exercise any of those public functions, in the conscientious and successful performance of which he has for many years enjoyed our confidence and deserved our gratitude.

We are of good hope that the retirement from the distractions of business and the perplexities of office, combined with the advantages to be derived from medical skill and a favorable climate, may in due course restore Mr. Mactavish . . . to at least an approximation towards his old robustness of constitution, which for so many years enabled him to withstand the trying climate of Hudson's Bay; and that he may be spared for many years to enjoy the fruits of a lifetime of hard work among us We believe it is Mr. Mactavish's intention to proceed slowly on his journey. He will remain perhaps some time at St. Paul, and probably also for several weeks in Canada, reaching England perhaps toward the end of July. We also hear it is his desire to pass the winter in the South of France, or in some country near the Mediterranean.

The good wishes we express, and the regrets at the

¹⁰⁴Begg, Creation of Manitoba, pp. 373-74.

¹⁰⁵Begg's Journal, p. 372.

departure of this gentleman from among us, are not the words of party spirit, but are the sentiments of all here, of every party and school of politics, who knew his kind considerateness of manner and moderation in his public capacity, and the many admirable traits which characterised him in the intercourse of private life. We fear we shall not soon "look upon his like again."¹⁰⁶

Mactavish was followed out of the Settlement by Dr. Cowan and his family on 31 May. During the uprising, Cowan had "behaved in a very discreet manner, courteous to all, but never" discussing or expressing "an opinion pro or con on questions over which the opposing parties were contending."¹⁰⁷ Cowan, in fact, seems to have made an excellent impression on those who knew him. While Garrioch noted that Cowan was a man of integrity,¹⁰⁸ O'Donnell referred to him as "one of nature's noblemen."¹⁰⁹ When the Métis had taken over his house in Fort Garry early in 1870, Cowan and his family had moved down to the Lower Fort.¹¹⁰ Cowan's intention to leave the Settlement as soon as he could had prompted Mactavish's appointing J. H. McTavish to act in his place. Within two weeks of Mactavish's departure Cowan and his family floated downstream with the Norway House brigade of

¹⁰⁶New Nation, Friday, 29 May 1870.

¹⁰⁷O'Donnell, Manitoba as I saw It, p. 110.

¹⁰⁸Garrioch, First Furrows (Winnipeg, 1923), p. 204.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Healy, Women of Red River, pp. 47-48.

boats on their way to Scotland by way of York Factory.¹¹¹

By 28 May, Begg was writing that Mactavish had reached Georgetown safely,¹¹² and on 15 June Mactavish wrote in shaky handwriting a short note to the Company regarding withdrawals from his account.¹¹³ He apparently did not go up into Canada but went directly to New York. The New Nation wrote:

Our readers will be glad to know that Mr. Mactavish arrived safely in New York on the 24th June, on his way home; and we are also happy to know in somewhat improved health. The day after he arrived at the Brefoort House in New York, he was waited upon by one of the staff of the Sun, a large and influential daily paper, and what passed during that interview will be found on our first page. Those here familiar with Mr. Mactavish's style will easily recognize the general truthfulness and correctness of the conversation. It is his usual straightforward, impartial and independent manner of reply.¹¹⁴

During the New York interview Mactavish indicated that he had taken with him no resentment against the Métis for the ordeal of the preceding winter. In describing the Settlers he said that none were rebellious: "The native population --the half-breeds--are peaceable. They are ignorant, but

¹¹¹Begg, Creation of Manitoba, p. 378.

¹¹²Begg's Journal, p. 376.

¹¹³A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, St. Paul, 15 Jun 1870.

¹¹⁴New Nation, Saturday, 16 Jul 1870.

they are trustworthy, and are men of good common sense."¹¹⁵

Mactavish left New York the following month, arrived in Liverpool on 21 July, and was dead two days later.¹¹⁶

Sir Stafford Northcote wrote: "He died soon after landing at Liverpool and none of us had an opportunity of seeing him at all."¹¹⁷ J. H. McTavish said:

The intelligence of the death of Governor Mactavish will be received with deep regret by every officer in the country and not only by them but also by the inhabitants of this Settlement--and the servants of the Company generally throughout the Territory will the loss be deeply deplored. Often difficulties with which he had to contend when prostrated on a bed of sickness /illegible/, as the Board are aware, I had an opportunity of forming an intimate /omission here/ and do not hesitate but say that the trial was such as few men have been called on to bear.¹¹⁸

Flags at Fort Garry and at the Emmerling House in Winnipeg, a hotel owned by an American named Henry Emmerling, were lowered to half mast;¹¹⁹ the New Nation, having spent itself on Mactavish's departure, nevertheless made a valiant effort to dredge up further eulogy;¹²⁰ others

¹¹⁵Ibid.; apparently the entire interview with the New York Sun reporter is here.

¹¹⁶New Nation, Saturday, 13 Aug 1870.

¹¹⁷A.H.B.C., A.7/4, Northcote to D. A. Smith, London, 11 Aug 1870.

¹¹⁸A.H.B.C., A.11/99, J. H. McTavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 27 Aug 1870.

¹¹⁹New Nation, Saturday, 13 Aug 1870.

¹²⁰Ibid.

in the Settlement perhaps thought of Mactavish more privately --as a member of the Red River Cricket Club and the scientific society, as a co-worker on the Council of Assiniboia, or just as the father of four of the Settlement's children.

Louis Riel still sat in Fort Garry, deserted by most of his Métis supporters and awaiting with some anxiety the slowly advancing troops of the 1,200-man British-Canadian Wolseley expedition. From Red River, Riel would eventually go into exile, then make one last vainglorious attempt at leadership and glory with far unhappier results. At his death he would be raised to martyrdom by many, a monument not to selfless dedication or nobility of spirit but to some sort of unhappy mixture of patriotism and talent dominated by a rampant, devouring egotism; a hollow symbol not to be admired but to be squabbled over and beaten about by factitious abuse and praise. Perhaps William Mactavish, the man whose dignity Riel had so heedlessly trampled on at Fort Garry during the winter of 1869-70, had earned for himself a better prize--the quiet respect of those who knew him.

CHAPTER XIII

CONCLUSION

Perhaps William Mactavish was not the man to lead Red River Settlement through the tumult and near-anarchy of the 1860's. Certainly he was in many ways a direct anti-thesis of the average politician. He was not known for public speaking ability; he was outspoken and occasionally quick-tempered; he was critical, perhaps occasionally overcritical, sensitive, and, ironically enough, basically lazy. Early descriptions portrayed him as a quiet, soft-spoken, pessimistic, intellectual, somewhat puritanical man. His business correspondence, however, showed no signs of undue pessimism or inordinately high standards, at least for others. And a fuller, almost contradictory personality emerged from his private correspondence. There his writing was eminently alive, direct, forceful, readable, and studded with penetrating remarks on situations and personalities. There he displayed not only the active, inquiring mind suggested by his sister Letitia but also an almost unsettling forthrightness in stating opinion.

Some of these traits matured and altered as the years passed, of course, but all remained throughout his life. The picture is probably distorted by the lack of personal correspondence in his later years, but that correspondence

available suggests that he was a stronger personality in his youth. He displayed an unusual insight then that faded with the years; or if still there remained below the surface. And in his early years he showed a sensitivity that approached artistic talent; this also seemed to dim with time and the fur trade. But Mactavish without doubt became more personable with the years. As the youthful aggressiveness of a highly intelligent lad wore off, he became increasingly liked and respected in both his capacity as chief officer of the fur trade in North America and as civic leader of Red River. Condemnations of him were invariably politically, not personally, inspired.

Mactavish's rule in Red River was conciliatory almost to the point of humility, but it did not result from any shortage of pride on Mactavish's part. Fortunately, however, Mactavish's was a flexible pride. As Governor of Assiniboia he was forced often to rise above his pride, and he seems to have developed the ability to derive an even greater satisfaction and pride by being able to do so. It was this callousness to his own pride, in fact, that more than anything else gave the appeasing tone to the government of Assiniboia in its final years.

His ability to subordinate pride to the interests of the Company and the Settlement was something that could come only from the increasing maturity and self-confidence

he acquired as he rose in the Company's service, a self-confidence that seems also to have released in Mactavish one of his more noticeable traits--a penchant for outspokenness and emotional outbursts that must have made his conversation frequently quite lively. As his sister Letitia suggested earlier, he often said things in private conversation under the stress of the moment that sacrificed accuracy for expression. This tendency to vent explicitly his feelings undoubtedly had at least its minor consequences down through the years, and Mactavish was aware of the need for more prudence in his conversation. His recognition of this need and his inability to meet it were amply illustrated in the interview he had with a reporter of the New York Sun on his way back to England in 1870. When the reporter first asked him what started the trouble in Red River, Mactavish replied:

I cannot tell you, sir. I do not think it would be proper for me to say anything on that subject. I have been Governor of that territory for fourteen years, and should anything be published as from me in relation to those difficulties, my statements might be construed as being personal; they might also be misrepresented, and they might occasion complications and troubles which no one could have imagined would flow from them. For all these reasons, and for others also, I decline to say anything whatever on political matters.¹

His urge to speak his mind soon got the better of his

¹New Nation, Saturday, 16 Jul 1870.

judgment, however. After a short digression on Red River agriculture, Mactavish spent the remainder of the interview discussing quite candidly some aspects of the recent "political matters."

But the three whips that drove Mactavish throughout his life were the partly contradictory, partly complimentary ones of independence, responsibility, and concern for integrity. Mactavish, within, was fiercely independent. And though it was never of the strength that would have enabled him to tear himself loose from the Company, it kept him to the end personally uncommitted to the Company and his job. He had none of the attachment, almost dedication, of Sir George Simpson; nor did he have the dedication to business as an end in itself of A. G. Dallas. Nowhere can be found those characteristics of the subordinate executive consumed by the idea of advancement or by fear of losing his job. Nowhere does he show himself intimidated by his superiors, though he followed their orders to the best of his ability. This suggestion of basic independence was one of the more subtle but nonetheless strong threads running through Mactavish's life.

But at no time was Mactavish's independence allowed to roam free. Always keeping it in check, dominating it in fact, was an overriding, almost puritanical, sense of responsibility. It was this, partly, that kept him with a

Company he cared little for in spite of his urge during his earlier years to move on. And it was largely this that kept him in Red River as Governor of Assiniboia, a job he detested passionately.

But if his sense of responsibility limited his independence, it at the same time provided the soil that nurtured and justified it. For it was an independence that grew from proven ability and accomplishment. His sense of responsibility not only kept him working for the Company, but kept his standard of performance high as well. Without it, lack of basic interest would surely have confined him to the lower ranks of the service.

And just as his sense of responsibility made Mactavish valuable to the Company, his related concern for integrity increased that value. His intellectual integrity, taking the form almost of intellectual detachment, became Mactavish's major source of pride. He looked at life with a clear detached gaze further focused by irony. His persistent pursuit of personal integrity became, in fact, almost a religion with him, and he occasionally fussed over it like an old woman fusses over geraniums.

From the Company's point of view, his integrity might have deprived the Hudson's Bay Company of that blind, unquestioning loyalty any organization prefers, but it gave the Company a man in a responsible job whom they could

trust. An example was the determination with which Mactavish took the responsibility for his own acts. In 1865, for instance, on a visit to St. Paul, Mactavish authorized the Company's agent there, Norman W. Kittson, to sell a number of furs in St. Paul since the price offered was considerably higher than could be gotten in Montreal. The Governor and Committee disapproved of the sale strongly, for obscure business reasons that Mactavish himself apparently never quite understood. Any responsible man would have acknowledged his responsibility for the sale at least once, perhaps twice, to make sure his subordinates were not blamed for his action. Mactavish's assumptions of responsibility approached tediousness, however, as in several letters running he repeated that the responsibility for the sale rested on his shoulders, that Kittson had sold them on his orders, and neither Kittson nor Clare, in charge of Fort Garry, were in any way to blame for the mistake.²

Mactavish's near-obsession with his integrity occasionally had him snapping at the Company. On one occasion he penned a quite testy reply to a letter from Fraser (the Company's Secretary) that must have caught Fraser completely off guard. Fraser had written about the additional salary of two hundred pounds a year Mactavish was to get as Governor of Assiniboia:

²See A.H.B.C., D.9/1, Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 12 Dec 1865, and other correspondence about the same time.

It was only today that it was discovered that this Salary had not been carried to your account. Apparently you would yourself never have drawn attention to the omission though it had deprived you for a time of an important portion of your well earned emolument. . . .

You will observe that although your Commission is dated the 4th October 1858, and although Governor Johnson's salary was paid up to the month of November, your Salary is made to commence from the commencement of the Outfit, namely the 1st June 1858. The reason of this is that as Governor Johnson was on furlough and you had all the work of the Office to do, it is considered by the Board but fair that you should have the Salary.

The Board are also glad to take advantage of the opportunity of thus showing their appreciation of your valuable service, during the last three years in which you have held the arduous and responsible office as Governor.³

This brought forth the following rather peevish response:

I had observed that it had not been credited in my account till lately but for reasons which it is unnecessary to go into did not call your attention to it much less wish anyone else to do so. I was perfectly well aware that the omission was an oversight which only required to be pointed out to be rectified. From what I have learned since I received your letter it would appear to have been Dr. Rae who called attention to my account, if it was he, he acted without my knowledge or consent as had I judged it necessary to call your attention to the subject I would have felt bound to do it myself, how Dr. Rae obtained his information I cannot say nor can I recollect if he ever spoke to me on the subject before I received your letter he or no other one ever heard me complain of the omission indeed I never recollect having mentioned the circumstance to any one except Mr. C.F. Clare and that only in reply to a question of his. My wish to resign [?] did not arise from any considerations regarding salary but because I felt

³A.H.B.C., A.6/36, Fraser to Mactavish, London, 11 July 1861.

that the duties of Governor sometimes occupied time which I thought was required by my other duties. And of course I felt called upon to acquaint the Governor & Committee with the fact. I am still of the same opinion and have been so ever since my appointment.

I acknowledge with feelings of gratification the Governor and Committees /sic/ very kind appreciation of my services and can assure them that my desire has always been to merit it.⁴

Mactavish apparently feared that Fraser would suspect him of indulging in idle complaining around Fort Garry about the Company's neglecting to pay him his salary, or that he had not had the courage to bring the subject up himself and so had inspired Rae to do it for him. That he took the matter so seriously is indicative of the seriousness with which he regarded his integrity and his reputation for it. Still, Fraser could only have regarded as unduly intemperate Mactavish's reply to a friendly, complimentary letter.

But Mactavish seems generally to have been on relaxed terms with the Secretaries of the Company, as the series of excerpts below might indicate. These Secretaries, who actually handled the everyday business of the Hudson's Bay Company fur trade, acting for the Governor and Committee, were W. G. Smith during the early years of Mactavish's reign, Thomas Fraser during the middle period until early in 1868, then W. G. Smith again. Between his terms as

⁴A.H.B.C., A.12/42, Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 3 Dec 1861.

Secretary, Smith acted in another capacity for the Company. During the period when Fraser was Secretary, Mactavish wrote a series of letters on business involving the affairs of deceased Company employees. The first was dated 26 February 1864:

I inclose to you a letter I have lately received from George Setter regarding some business transactions of his with Mr. Smith. I have written Mr. Smith so frequently begging him to give this man & others on the same kind of business an answer, without success that I now send to you in the hope that you may be more fortunate in inducing Mr. Smith to answer the letters of applicants who so long as he keeps silent will pester me, who has neither interest in or [sic] knowledge of the subject on which information is wanted.⁵

Then on 12 December 1865:

I wish you would stir up Mr. Smith & get him to answer his correspondents here, they positively mob me & think that as I was at home last year I am answerable for short comings. He fairly deceived me as he assured me he had written & sent accounts to many of his correspondents here whose claim I was pressing. I have written him every mail that I was here since my return but cannot get an answer from him.⁶

Then one week later:

I hope Mr. Smith employed a portion of his holidays in making out the accounts of his correspondents here for the last at least four years-- when made out that from modesty he may not hesitate to send them. If he does not soon give in & send the accounts I mean to commence a daily series of letters to him & recommend all his friends here to

⁵A.H.B.C., A.11/97, Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 26 Feb 1864.

⁶A.H.B.C., A.12/44, Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 12 Dec 1865.

do the same & not to forget to send their letters unpaid. . . .⁷

And again on 13 February 1866:

The mails have been very irregular of late & it may be that advices from Mr. Smith which under ordinary circumstances should have been here are now on the way. At all events they are anxiously looked for & if asking for them gives me a right to expect them I think he will himself admit that I should look for them his correspondents pester me particularly the Exors of the late Alex Ross, who have for years been anxious to wind up the Estate but cannot do so without Mr. Smith's account with it.⁸

His concern for his integrity and his need to have it recognized might even have proved a hindrance in his management of the Settlement. Overly-conscious of local suspicion of the Company's motives, Mactavish was often deterred by this suspicion from taking a strong stand. Had it not been for this self-consciousness, or concern with his own and the Company's local image, he might have done otherwise in the Corbett and Schultz crises, in the Snow road-building venture, and in Riel's March 1870 demands on the Company. Whether different behavior on Mactavish's part in any of the above incidents would have been desirable might be something else again. There can be little doubt, however, that a generally more forceful attitude toward the activities of the Canadian Party would have helped to allay Métis apprehensions. But Mactavish was afraid, not only that he had

⁷Ibid., Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 19 Dec 1865.

⁸Ibid., Mactavish to Fraser, Fort Garry, 13 Feb 1866.

not the necessary force to support him in taking action but also that such action would be construed as Company persecution, and thus a lack of integrity on his part. When others doubted his integrity Mactavish was pushed by his sensitivity into doubting it himself, giving rise to his reactions approaching rage when slurs were cast on it. A desire to avoid such slurs undoubtedly affected his decisions.

And just as Mactavish's pre-occupation with his integrity gave the Company trouble on occasion and contributed to the free rein given agitation in the Settlement, his repressed longing for independence and change gave the Company cause for anxiety in the later years. Before becoming Governor of Assiniboia, Mactavish had released his urge to be free by thinking periodically of quitting, and dwelling on the possible collapse of the Company. Early, he expressed dissatisfaction with the course his life was taking, with the rut it seemed to have placed him in, and it was an attitude he never lost. He saved his money, withheld any mental commitment to a career with the Company, and dreamed regularly of other occupations in better climates. After becoming Governor of Red River, now past forty, he turned his thoughts in the opposite direction--from starting over again to retiring--and the Company during Mactavish's last twelve years in its employ was constantly put to it to

fight off Mactavish's threats of resigning. As the years went by, the Company saw in Mactavish as Governor of Assiniboia a man who would be hard to replace, and they were quite unwilling to lose him. Their anxiety in this regard is shown by their constant praise and near-deference in the 1860's, a deference not at all demanded by Mactavish.

But Mactavish was trapped by principle, high pay, and lack of any advanced or specialized education that would qualify him for a field other than business. The result was that in spite of his forever mulling over the possibility of quitting, and in spite of his repeated threats to resign, it was not choice but death that eventually separated Mactavish from the Company. That principle played a part in his staying he indicated as early as 1839: ". . . I am perfectly aware that changing is not in favour of a man's character even though no fault can be attached to him."⁹ But this was not the whole answer. Casting himself adrift in the wilds of North America, or even on a furlough in England, with no finances or trade to support him, would have asked a courage of Mactavish that would have had to grow from more desperation than he ever felt. It was far easier to wishfully predict the dissolution of the Company, an event that would relieve him of his decision.

⁹P.A.C., Hargrave Papers, Mactavish to father, York Factory, 1 Sep 1839.

If anyone, in fact, was a puppet of circumstances it was William Mactavish. Mactavish did not happen to things, things happened to Mactavish. Always a prisoner of his circumstances, never rising above them, Mactavish never acted on events and produced them, he merely reacted to the events produced by others. This may have been the result of his growing up in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company, which in many ways was similar to a military career. He, like the English-speaking Settlers he governed, was in the larger sense more used to being taken care of than of taking care of himself. Everyday affairs, even the large everyday affairs of Assiniboia and Ruperts Land, he managed himself, but the authority for the overall direction of his life he delegated to the Hudson's Bay Company. In doing so he hobbled himself, preventing his obvious intelligence, understanding, and sensitivity from making him the man they might have. But if Mactavish failed to achieve his potential, most others do the same, and he cannot very well be criticized on that score.

Unfortunately, however, his habit of surrendering to circumstance probably affected his management of the Settlement, robbing him of the boldness made necessary by his weak position if order were to be maintained. The job of Governor of Assiniboia in the 1860's did not want recklessness, but neither did it want too much caution, and too much

caution may have been what Mactavish brought to it. Admittedly, boldness and forcefulness was not the whole answer. Dallas, for instance, had both, and they got him nowhere in managing the Settlement. Mactavish, though, had far more potential as Governor of Red River than did Dallas. He had a flexibility, an understanding, and to some extent an integrity that Dallas lacked. And by not taking full advantage of his ability Mactavish fell short of something Dallas was not capable of--wise political leadership.

Instead, Mactavish sought outlets for his frustration. Deriving little satisfaction or self-esteem from his job, he took in his early years to physical activity--fishing, trapping, and horseback riding. Later, in Red River, he became President of the Fort Garry Cricket Club,¹⁰ and, turning to more sedentary pursuits, an officer in the Institute of Rupert's Land, a scientific society that for several years carried on a steady correspondence with the United States Smithsonian Institute discussing such subjects as geology, agriculture, and flora and fauna.¹¹ Ill health, advancing age and the pressures of family life turned his leisure attention increasingly away from his former pursuits

¹⁰Hargrave, Red River, p. 341.

¹¹A.H.B.C., D.9/1, George Lawson to Mactavish and Schultz, Kingston, 31 Mar 1862; Gunn and Tuttle, History of Manitoba, p. 312.

toward such activities as making close observations of the soil, climate, features, and resources of the surrounding country. "I had to do something of the kind," he said in 1870, "to keep from rusting down into an oyster."¹²

And, paradoxically enough, this search for interests to keep him mentally alive even found him toward the end of the 1860's deriving a vague satisfaction in being Governor of Assiniboia. To a slight, well-concealed extent he became proud of the decrepit machine he had nursed for more than a decade. But it was a desperate sort of satisfaction, springing less from genuine gratification than from the common need for something to nourish his self-esteem.

It was a desperation the Company chose to ignore, however. The Company persisted from the start in pretending they thought Mactavish wanted relief from his duties as Governor of Rupert's Land instead of the Governor of Assiniboia. In view of Mactavish's unmistakable statements on the subject, it was a mistake on the part of the Company that could only have been deliberate. In May 1868, for instance, Mactavish turned down an offer of relief, saying: "I observe what you say about relieving me here. I would be very glad if I was relieved but When it comes it will be once and for all. My difficulties arise from my being

¹²New Nation, Saturday, 16 Jul 1870.

Governor of Assiniboia."¹³ Obviously, the Company was offering Mactavish relief as Governor of Rupert's Land. Wanting Mactavish to remain as Governor of Assiniboia, but unable to do much to make his position easier, the Company chose to avoid a direct confrontation with Mactavish on the subject by deliberately misinterpreting his complaints. The letter mentioned above also revealed that they saw Mactavish's main value to the Company to be not as a fur trade officer but as governor of the hard-to-manage little Settlement.

Part of Mactavish's problem in governing the Settlement, aside from the obvious major factor of lack of military support, arose from the nature of the community. As already pointed out, it was an artificial little colony born and force fed by the fur trade. It became a settled, stable community in a wilderness where if a European community were to be found at all it should have been of the regular frontier variety, sustaining itself wildly on its own reckless energy rather than placidly through the paternalism of the Hudson's Bay Company. A bit of civilized but naive humanity isolated from brawling civilization, it was peculiarly susceptible to the political agitation that Canada later unwittingly injected into it from the outside.

¹³A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish probably to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 12 May 1868.

Its government was equally contradictory--potentially one thing but actually another. Several writers have noticed an apparent discrepancy in the Nor'-Wester's representations of the Company as being both weak and a tyrant. Hargrave said that "it seems strange to us how the unfortunate Company could be a weak tyrant."¹⁴ But that was actually what the Company's government was--a tyrant incapable of tyranny. Its actions in its early years, taking advantage of governmental and commercial control of a smaller Settlement to enforce its monopoly and combat the free traders, showed clearly that it was capable of tyranny. Tyranny must be supported by force, however, and the Company's lack of force to sustain it gradually diluted its authoritarian rule to the point of anarchy. By the time Mactavish appeared on the scene, the Company needed in the Settlement not a strong, authoritarian governor but a democratic, conciliatory one, and they found one in Mactavish.

Unfortunately, the Government Mactavish had to work with was automatically open to criticism. It was a company government, and its policy conformed suspiciously to what might have been Company policy as well. As it had supported Dallas' actions in the Corbett crisis, the Company sup-

¹⁴Hargrave, Red River, p. 444.

ported Mactavish in that involving Schultz.¹⁵ Perhaps it did so through necessity, being too far away to take a direct hand in affairs, but it is doubtful that they would have done things differently. What Mactavish gave the Settlement was peace at any price, and peace is good for business while civil disorder is not. In maintaining peace at all costs, even at the cost of justice and good government, Mactavish followed a course that the Company, far away and uninterested in abstract ideals, could only approve of.

But what was good for the Company was also good for the Settlement, perhaps, and the fact that Mactavish's policy was best for business might only have been a coincidence. Civil unrest not only might damage the Company's business but, as Mactavish and others in the Settlement saw it, might develop into a general civil war perhaps involving the nearby Indian tribes, which would bring disaster onto the Settlement as well. The Company in its correspondence never laid down a policy line for Mactavish, and there is no indication whatever that Mactavish was placing the Company's interests above those of the Settlement. Nowhere in his letters to the Company or anyone else did he give cause for suspicion that the Company and not the Settlement

¹⁵A.H.B.C., A.6/42, W. G. Smith to Mactavish, London, 4 Apr 1868; Ibid. W. G. Smith to Mactavish, London, 7 Mar 1868; Ibid., W. G. Smith to Mactavish, London, 28 Mar 1868.

was the prime factor in his decisions. Quite possibly Mactavish was a trifle over-dedicated to pacifism; quite possibly using the Métis to restore order would not have resulted in the religious wars he and others feared. The Rebellion, if it proved nothing else, proved that it takes two sides to make a civil war, and the English-speaking Settlers were not inclined to participate. All this is hindsight, however, something Mactavish did not have the benefit of. And if he was too dedicated to pacifism, pacifism was the prevailing mood of half the Settlement. When all is said and done, until the unlikely event that good evidence appears showing that Mactavish sacrificed the Settlement's best interests for those of the Company, he must be given credit for doing as his general character suggests he did, acting in the best interests of Red River.

Furthermore, Mactavish's little government should not be condemned out of context. While Mactavish was doing his level best to manage Red River in spite of overwhelming disadvantages, governments in London and Quebec-Ottawa were failing the Settlement on a scale Mactavish's little government never dreamed of. Dilatory, negligent, wrapped up in politics and parsimony, the British and Canadian Governments let Red River down where Red River had most right to expect responsible governing, not from a commercial corporation but from responsible governments. Unfortunately, neither was

responsible to Red River. So though Mactavish's government was something of a failure, perhaps judgment should be mild.

And if it was a failure, it was one caused and dramatized by Canadian agitation. And the ironic part of this agitation is that in virtually prostrating the Company's government during the 1860's, the Canadian agitators hurried annexation not a whit and brought on a drastic decline in Canada's local popularity. Canada was not unpopular among the Settlers before the 1860's, and its unpopularity in the later years was directly attributable to the Canadian Party. Mactavish's inability to successfully combat Canadian agitation in the Settlement gave rise to the tremendous antagonism for that country aroused in the Métis, and so led directly to the Rebellion.

Though Mactavish might have unintentionally contributed to the causes leading to the Rebellion, however, he can by no means be accused of intentionally contributing to its outbreak or continuance. Particularly can his "inactivity" not be interpreted as a sign of favoring the Métis cause. Mactavish's course against the Métis in October and November of 1869 was basically identical with that taken against Corbett and Schultz, and for much the same reasons. Following the Corbett-Stewart jail breaks, the Council issued a public notice explaining its actions during the affair:

At a meeting of the Governor and Council of Assiniboia, on the 28th instant [April 7] the attention of the Council was directed to the recent outrages that had been committed in the unlawful rescue from prison of G. C. Corbett, a prisoner undergoing his sentence, and of James Stewart, a person in custody on a charge of felony, and to the creditable zeal which had been shown by so many of the inhabitants for the protection of lawful authority.

The Council, while viewing with feelings of deep regret and abhorrence the lawless conduct of the men engaged in these rescues, for which all concerned in them directly or indirectly must still be held responsible, were yet highly gratified at the manner in which so many of the well-disposed inhabitants had proffered their services for the forcible prevention of these disgraceful proceedings, and unanimously resolved that notices should be publicly posted expressing the sense entertained by the Council of the laudable spirit manifested by these inhabitants in behalf of the interests of public order; interests which, under the regular administration of Justice as heretofore by the Magistrates and the Courts, the Council doubt not will be duly preserved.

The Council further desire to make it publicly known that, while they are satisfied there were, among these loyal inhabitants, men who would have willingly defended the prison at the sacrifice of their lives, the Executive were restrained from using the force at their disposal by motives of humanity; by the desire to avoid bloodshed; by a wish to prevent deadly exasperation of feeling among the settlers; and, above all, by a consideration of the dangerous consequences to the whole community that would have arisen from the Indian tribes witnessing the spectacle of open warfare between different sections of the people.¹⁶

J. J. Hargrave, writing in 1868-69, still felt the Government's reasoning in not taking action in the Corbett affair valid:

¹⁶ Oliver, Canadian North-West, I, p. 527, Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 28 Apr 1863.

With the first shot fired in the strife, the authority they [The Company] possessed over their undisciplined and unorganized friends would have disappeared. The skirmish occurring on the first day would have been merely the prelude to a series of struggles, the end of which no human wisdom could foresee. Bloodshed would have been avenged by further blood. Mr. Corbett had made himself personally unpopular among the French Canadians by his constant attacks upon their creed; and people who, with the example before them of the Irish disturbances in the English towns, have witnessed the peculiarly susceptible temper of its votaries when exposed to hostile criticism, and their proneness to meet the arguments of the lips with those of the brickbat, ought to appreciate the hesitation of an unsupported government, in letting loose the pioneers of a war which would immediately have become one of Protestant against Catholic, and in which the primary cause of the disturbance would soon have been wholly lost in the multitude of complications with which we would have been overwhelmed.

The reign of such conflicting elements at any time would be destructive, but when the peculiar circumstances of the settlement at the date in question, amid unsettled and warring Indian tribes is considered, it will be seen how important it was to permit the savages to see no symptoms of internal quarrels among the people, but on the contrary, a unity of sentiment and action in all public movements.¹⁷

Hargrave then went on to discuss Governor Eyre, of Jamaica who, supported by troops, had dealt forcefully with a situation vaguely similar to that at Red River and with disastrous results:

Lastly, I may mention the case of Governor Eyre, of Jamaica, as that of a man who has since had to

¹⁷Hargrave, Red River, pp. 288-89.

deal with something of the same nature as then threatened the very existence of the community, and beg to put the case. If he, supported by a military force to regulate the strife, and assisted by subordinates officially supposed to be competent to perform their perspective duties, could restore order only after the occurrence of the scenes which caused such deep indignation in England, what, in the event of a civil war between races and creeds, might reasonably be supposed to have become of the Government of Assiniboia, unsupported by troops of any kind to give a decided preponderance to the side of Law, and provided with subordinate officials perfectly unaccustomed to deal with popular results? Again, if Governor Eyre, acting under a direct commission from the Crown, and supported by a friendly Government, found escape from the consequences of popular odium a matter so difficult, what would personally have become of Governor Dallas, when called to account by a Colonial Secretary, manifestly hostile to his principles, and a Government which for years had withheld its practical support and recognition from them, for a butchery, to which he had lent the weight of an authority, derived from a Commission, the right of the donors of which to grant it, was the desire of all concerned, except themselves, to annul and ignore? ¹⁸

Hargrave's comparison of the situation in Red River with the Ireland and Jamaica rebellions is rather far-fetched--in both cases native groups were being suppressed by forces essentially alien--but it shows the kind of thinking going on in some circles in Red River in 1869, before the Rebellion. If nothing else, Mactavish's policy can at least be commended for its consistency.

As shown in the chapter on Riel's capture of Fort Garry, Mactavish was bombarded with criticism for his

¹⁸ Ibid.

actions during the early part of the Rebellion. The criticism emanated from the more extreme factions involved, however--the French and the Canadians. Much of that from French sources resulted from statements of Father Ritchot and William O'Donoghue, an Irish-American Fenian who was one of Riel's closest associates. Ritchot, after talking with Mactavish, returned to the Metis with the information that Mactavish supported their cause, a distortion that was spread widely.¹⁹ O'Donoghue, in a letter to the Speaker of the House of Commons, dated 26 February 1875, said:

I make the following statement of facts, which I can prove most conclusively:

The insurrection was advised by Governor William Mactavish who, with other officers of the Hudson's Bay Company, also aided and abetted it from its inception up to the very hour it ceased to exist. That Riel was in constant communication with Governor Mactavish, and on many occasions under his instructions. That he, Governor Mactavish, fully recognised the Provisional Government. That Donald A. Smith, on arriving at Fort Garry, recognised the Government also in my own hearing, and with Governor Mactavish, was Riel's advisor during his stay in the Fort, and after the departure of both of these from the country, Riel continued to hold counsel with John Mactavish, who then represented the Hudson's Bay Company.²⁰

It is difficult to figure out what O'Donoghue was trying to do here, unless it was to give the Rebellion, and therefore

¹⁹United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 18, note by Dennis, Friday, 29 Oct.

²⁰Gunn and Tuttle, History of Manitoba, p. 355.

his own activities, more of a legal air by tying Mactavish and the Company in with it.

A. H. de Tremaudan, referring to Mactavish's "intrigues,"²¹ "sly role,"²² and "weakness of character,"²³ said that Mactavish was once overheard asking a man named Roman Nault why Riel did not agitate.²⁴ De Tremaudan also said that a Francois Laroque declared under oath that he had been the carrier of a letter in which Mactavish suggested that Riel occupy the fort.²⁵ De Tremaudan went on to mention the O'Donoghue testimony quoted above and to discuss Mactavish's "great duplicity," saying that throughout the early part of the Rebellion Mactavish was "soufflant le chaud et le froid, conseillant à Riel d'agir au moment même où il faisait parvenir à McDougall des paroles d'encouragement et de bienvenue."²⁶ Another French writer, A. G.

²¹A. H. de Tremaudan, Histoire de la Nation Metisse, p. 215.

²²Ibid., p. 209.

²³Ibid., p. 191.

²⁴Ibid., p. 181.

²⁵Ibid., p. 181.

²⁶Ibid., p. 182: "blowing hot and cold, advising Riel to take action and at the same time sending words of encouragement and welcome to McDougall;" (translated by author)

Morice, differed with de Tremaudan on this point, saying that Mactavish was not being deceitful or dishonest, just political. Morice said that Mactavish favored the Métis cause, but as the chief North American officer of the Hudson's Bay Company had to consider the Company's interests and not compromise it in the eyes of Canada and Great Britain. "D'où ses efforts journaliers pour ménager la chèvre et le chou, efforts que chacun comprendrait alors qu'il n'y eût pas eu la question de son état maladif et sa très grande faiblesse pour excuser ses tergiversations."²⁷

G. R. Huyshe said:

. . . the uniform success of the insurgents in all their plans points undoubtedly . . . to sympathy, if not collusion, on the part of some of the Hudson's Bay Company's officials at Fort Garry. . . . Their utter inertness, and laissez aller policy, cannot be explained away by the illness of the Governor. He had the advice of a council, composed of many of the leading residents, to whom the prevalent feeling of discontent must have been well known, but yet nothing was done to check the rising spirit of rebellion, which soon passed beyond the control of its originators.²⁸

²⁷A. G. Morice, La Race Métis, p. 42: "He was making daily attempts to manage the goat and the dabbage, and everyone would have understood this at the time had it not been for the tendency to excuse his evasion because of his illness and very great weakness;" (translated by author).

²⁸G. R. Huyshe, The Red River Expedition (London, 1871), p. 8.

John A. MacDonald told Donald A. Smith that "all the letters I get from the unprejudiced observers in the North-West, or people who have lived in the North-West, continually make a point of this, that the Company's people are suspected of secretly fomenting this insurrection."²⁹ MacDonald is supported here by one of his "unprejudiced observers," John Schultz, who, according to "J. W.," was "clearly of the opinion that, had proper measures been taken by the Hudson's Bay Company on the first sign of the outbreak, of which they had due notice, no insurrectionary movement would have taken place."³⁰

Support for Mactavish's actions during the Rebellion come from the more moderate section of the community, some of Red River's leading citizens, and even from two prominent members of the Canadian Party. Archbishop Machray wrote in March 1870 that:

. . . the most undeserved suspicion has been thrown out upon gentlemen whose reports could have been thoroughly relied upon. The Officers of the Company in this Settlement Governor Mactavish, Judge Black, & Dr. Cowan are men of the highest integrity and honour. . . . Your Excellency may depend upon it that Governor Mactavish did everything he could to prevent and stop the insurrection. He, Judge Black, & Dr. Cowan have been as faithful to Canada, as if they had been

²⁹Willson, Life of Lord Strathcona, p. 200.

³⁰United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 49, notes by J. W. between 4 and 22 Nov 1869.

your Excellency's officers. . . . An active man of Spirit at the head of Affairs might perhaps have at once trampled it out and might have perhaps once and again changed the course of events; but Mr. Mactavish has been incapable of action from serious illness from the first and Dr. Cowan, most excellent man that he is, is constitutionally unequal to the responsibilities and ventures necessary for grappling vigorously with such a disorder.³¹

Bishop Taché said in 1874 that: ". . . all the officers of the Company were opposed to any resistance to Canada, although they were well aware that the population certainly had some grounds for complaint and dissatisfaction."³²

Major C. A. Boulton, leader of the Canadian expedition from Portage la Prairie, wrote that in refusing to try to bring McDougall in by force, and even in declining offers to defend Fort Garry before Riel occupied it, "he must now be judged to have acted wisely."³³ Dennis stated in October 1869 that he was convinced that Mactavish was opposed to the road block at the River Sale.³⁴ In 1874, he testified that:

Governor Mactavish, although in a very critical state of health, did all in his power to dissuade the people from the course they were pursuing

³¹Begg's Journal, pp. 503-504. Machray to Young, 18 Mar 1870.

³²Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874, p. 12, Taché testimony.

³³Boulton, Reminiscences, pp. 67-68.

³⁴United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 18, notes written by Dennis, Friday, 29 Oct.

in connection with the outbreak by explaining to them the situation, assuring them their interests would be perfectly safe in the hands of the Canadian Government, and that they would be fairly dealt with. Dr. Cowan also took the same course.³⁵

Dennis, it might be pointed out, was about the only Canadian in the Settlement in a position to know what steps Mactavish and the Council of Assiniboia took during the early part of the Rebellion. Other Canadians talking on the subject did so from mere conjecture only. Dennis had particular reason to doubt Mactavish's complicity in the Rebellion. Mactavish had written him as follows on 4 December:

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your Letter of the 3rd instant, making inquiries as to the number of guns which might be had from the Hudson Bay Company's posts near the Settlement. In reply I beg to say that at present I cannot give any very definite information, as the stock, at no time very large at any of those posts, will at present entirely depend on what the wants of the Indians have been in the autumn, but there may be still on hand at those posts as follows:--At Fort Alexander, possibly ten; at White Horse Plain, from ten to fifteen; at Point du Chine, from four to six; at Portage la Prairie must be very few. From here I could supply a very large number if I could get them out, which for more than a week past I have been watching an opportunity to do. Had it not been for the excitement about the pork In Schultz's warehouse there would have been in all probability sixty guns in one of the outhouses here, which is without the wall, besides a good supply sent to Oak Point, but which, owing to the appearance of the people here, Dr. Cowan caused to be countermanded when the sledges were loading. I enclose four orders for the delivery to all arms to your messengers having

³⁵ Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874,
p. 187, Dennis testimony.

authority from you to receipt for them.³⁶

J. H. O'Donnell even said that the officials of the Company were not only loyal but were the real protectors of the Canadians during their imprisonment.³⁷ And one Canadian, a G. D. MacVicar, who had been captured in Schultz's warehouse but later escaped, mentioned Company officials as having been among those helping him to escape from the Settlement.³⁸

Justifying Mactavish's not having taken more action, Isaac Cowie, stationed by the Company at Fort Qu'appelle throughout the Rebellion, extended the idea of fear of civil war:

Without an imperial military force which might be considered impartial, it was impossible, in cases of trouble when the British and French as a whole took opposite sides, to call upon one side to support the government without plunging the Settlement into a civil and religious war which, like a prairie fire, would have spread throughout the length and breadth of Ruperts Land, and involved the Indian tribes as well. Possibly the British element in the RR Settlement might have held their own against the skilled hunter-warriors of the Metis, but every post and Christian mission station from RR to the Rocky Mountains and from the boundary line to the Arctic

³⁶United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 91, Mactavish to Dennis, 4 Dec 1869.

³⁷O'Donnell, Manitoba as I Saw It, p. 27.

³⁸P. A. M., Red River Disturbances, George Duncan MacVicar to Josephine Larwell, Brokenhead River, 5 Feb 1870.

Ocean might have been swept out of existence.³⁹ Cowie, going on to defend the Company's officers in general, described how Donald A. Smith's proclamation was given wide distribution in the Qu'Appelle area, with the Company's officers traveling far and wide translating it to the Indians.⁴⁰ There were no Company officers in the Swan River District sympathizing with the Métis, Cowie continued, and the only Company employee he knew of at Fort Garry that was sympathetic with the Rebellion was John H. McTavish.⁴¹ This, incidentally, is apparently the origin of the oft-repeated but never substantiated statement that Mactavish, the accountant at Fort Garry and apparently no relation to William Mactavish, was sympathetic with the Rebellion. This does not seem to be true. Probably Mactavish, J. H. McTavish, and most of the other Company officers were in a sense sympathetic with the Metis. The Metis, essentially, were rebelling against the Canadians. The Company officers knew full well what the Métis had been putting up with from the Canadians during the preceeding few years, if only because they had been putting up with much the same thing themselves. It is a long step between sympathy with the

³⁹Cowie, Company of Adventurers, p. 160.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 405-405.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 397.

Métis and sympathy with their rebellion, however. Mactavish was firmly opposed to the uprising, and his strong insistence on Cowan's being replaced by J. H. McTavish suggests that there was no fundamental difference in their policies during the hard days of the Rebellion.

Some writers support their suggestions that the Company favored the Rebellion by listing grievances held by the Company's officers. The Company's officers in North America, these say, resented the transfer's having been arranged without their being consulted, and felt as if they "had been bought and sold."⁴² That the Company's officers felt that way is doubtful. The Company's officers, in fact, realized that the Company had little choice but to accept the terms the British Government offered them early in 1869.⁴³

A stronger argument is that presented by G. F. G. Stanley, who said the Company was probably not anxious for a change, and if one was to come they would have preferred it to be to Crown Colony status rather than a transfer to Canada.⁴⁴ And W. L. Morton pointed out that the transfer would change the Company's position from that of governing

⁴²Begg's Journal, Intro. by Morton, p. 6; Stephen Leacock, Canada, the Foundations of its Future (Montreal, 1941), p. 162.

⁴³A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letter from Mactavish to Howe, Fort Garry, 14 May 1870.

⁴⁴Stanley, Birth of Western Canada, pp. 62-63.

to that of being governed,⁴⁵ and governed by a Canada that for years had indulged in propoganda against the Company. Furthermore, the increased settlement that would follow would disrupt the fur trade, and bring increasing numbers of traders to compete with it.⁴⁶

Taylor presented another side to this argument:

I have no doubt that all the officers of the Hudson Bay Company in the Northwest have been embittered against political connexion with Canada, by the same causes. As an independent English Colony, much more as a Territory of the United States, these men by their culture, experience, and habits of ascendancy over their dependents and the Indians, would be the leaders in all public affairs. They might be such under the confederation: but the W. McDougall programme was evidently inspired by jealousy and hostility to the officers of the Hudson Bay Company. The latter were well aware of this, and have submitted to the insurrection against the Canadian authority, rather than make any strenuous effort to resist it.⁴⁷

Taylor went on to say that, because they would get more of an indemnity for their loss, the Company's officers would have preferred annexation to the United States. Both Taylor and Malmros had a disturbing tendency to imagine everyone they met in the Settlement to be ardent supporters of United

⁴⁵Begg's Journal, Intro. by Morton, p. 6.

⁴⁶Ibid.; Harvey Golden, The French Element in the Red River Settlement, unpub. Master's thesis, University of Manitoba.

⁴⁷P.A.M., United States: Letters Received by State Department from Agent for Red River Affairs, Taylor to Fish, Washington, 25 Jan 1870.

States annexation. The officers of the Company, however, were mainly English or Scotch, and though some might have occasionally made statements to the effect that annexation of the territory by the United States would prove more profitable for them, the bulk of them were decidedly British in sympathy and had it been left up to them they probably would have voted overwhelmingly to stay within the Empire.

Some of these officers probably did suffer from vague fears that advancing settlement would damage the fur trade. And perhaps since they had a direct stake in the fur trade profits they feared that these profits would be cut into by taxation, even though discriminatory taxation was supposedly prohibited by the transfer agreement. But the monopoly was a dead issue, of course, and the Company's officers even before 1860 had been convinced that someone other than they should govern the territory. And Mactavish, for one, the key officer involved, was willing to risk profit-cutting taxation if only to get out from under the job of governing Red River. In short, though there might have been a measure of apprehension in their ranks, the evidence that the Company's officers supported the Rebellion adds up to nothing.

Mactavish's dislike of Canada has even been brought in as an "explanation" for his behavior before and during the

Rebellion. There can be little doubt that the years of Canadian agitation in Red River, along with the Canadian Government's behavior toward the Company and himself, inspired in Mactavish a strong antipathy to Canada and Canadians generally. It was an antipathy not confined to Mactavish among the English-speaking part of the Settlement, but an antipathy nonetheless, and it gained expression in statements such as: the Settlers "look with little favour on the transfer of the Colony to Canada" (June 1868);⁴⁸ "I very much fear that the Canadian Government will not be able to hold here. It has taken a bad course" (September 1869);⁴⁹ and "I am doubtful if the Leaders in this business wish to make an arrangement with Canada" (December 1869).⁵⁰ This kind of statement may reflect less the actual situation than Mactavish's own prejudice. As James W. Taylor said:

I have known Governor McTavish since 1859, and have observed that his aversion to Canada and Canadians has been constantly increasing. The persistent agitation by the Canadian Parliament, and by the press of the Western Province, against the charter organization and policy of the Hudson

⁴⁸A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish probably to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 5 Jun 1868.

⁴⁹P.A.M., Red River Disturbances, Dugas to Tache, 26 Sep 1869.

⁵⁰A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 28 Dec 1869.

Bay Company, has annoyed him, but he has often said to me that the worst result has been to make turbulent citizens of all Canadians, who have emigrated to Red River.⁵¹

When a band of Canadians one day hoisted a large flag with the word "Canada" across its face one writer described it as "anything but pleasing to Governor McTavish." Mac-tavish was even against the Council's making an official expression of welcome to the Canadian takeover:

It is Archdeacon McLean a busybody who commenced-- and the joke is that a large section of the Settlement are very decided in their expression of dislike to the Canadian Government and there is certainly /circulating/ a petition to the Queen begging that the Government may be left in the hands of the Company or, if the Company will not continue to hold the trust, that the Queen will be pleased to name a Governor and send him out as the Chief Authority in the Country--yet parson McLean calls on the Council to welcome the Canadian rule and the greater number of the Council have responded.⁵²

Coupled with this was a seeming predilection for the United States. In 1867 he wrote the Company: "I think the best thing that can be done by the Co. is to sell the Territory to the Yankees as soon as Dakotah fills up this part of the Country cannot be held by England a moment longer than the Yankees choose to allow."⁵³ Malmros reported

⁵¹P.A.M., United States: Letters Received by State Department from Agent for Red River Affairs, Taylor to Fish, Washington, 25 Jan 1870.

⁵²A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish probably to W. G. Smith, 13/16 Oct 1869.

⁵³A.H.B.C., A.12/44, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 29 May 1867.

in December 1869 that:

. . . at an interview I had yesterday with Governor Mactavish the latter told me confidentially that he contemplated to submit to their House in London whether it might not be in the interest of the Company to favor annexation of this country to the United States. On a former occasion Gov. Mactavish mentioned to me, likewise in confidence, that with the expected influx of immigration, the commercial interests of the Company required the protection of a strong military government, such as the United States.⁵⁴

And writing to the Company on 25 December 1869, Mactavish said: "Indeed, it is now for the interest of the Settlers here that annexation should take place at once."⁵⁵ But elsewhere Mactavish did not sound so pro-American:

I confess that circumstances make me more doubtful about the settlement of this most vexatious affair than I was, as, if the mischief remains working till spring, the country will be overrun by a lawless horde of sympathisers from Minnesota and Dakotah, who, under the pretence of aiding, will assume the direction of the movement, and will pay but little respect to the rights of half-breeds or others in the Territory.⁵⁶

Mactavish, in fact, might have admired certain aspects of the United States, or at least was not intellectually crippled by determined prejudices in that area. Furthermore, he undoubtedly was resentful of Canada. Still, his orienta-

⁵⁴ P.A.M., United States: Despatches from Consul in Winnipeg, Malmros to Davis, 29 Dec 1869.

⁵⁵ A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish probably to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 13/16 Oct 1869.

⁵⁶ United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, pp. 190-191, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, Fort Garry, 11 Dec 1869.

tion, like that of the Company officers generally, was thoroughly British, and there would be no profit at all in trying in his antipathy to Canada or his tolerance of the United States to his behavior before and during the Rebellion.

Mactavish's illness is an even less tangible question. There can be no doubt that Mactavish was sick at the wrong time, and it raises two questions: (1) would he have done things differently had he not been ill? and (2) would he have in any case been able to shift the course of the uprising? The answer to both is yes. Mactavish probably would not have tried to defend Fort Garry from the Métis no matter how good his health might have been, but there is every likelihood that the Rebellion would not have reached that point. He probably would not have done much more about the survey stoppage, either, but he almost certainly would have gone out to the River Sale and tried to persuade the insurgents to take down the road block, and he would have gone down to Pembina to escort McDougall into the Settlement. And he probably would have been successful in bringing McDougall in. Mactavish's influence with the Métis was probably second only to that of Taché. It was under Mactavish's regime that the Métis had achieved near-equality on the Council of Assiniboia. It was under Mactavish's regime,

too, that Catholic religious holidays received official recognition. Mactavish's wife was a Catholic; and though she was not a French half-breed, she was at least a half-breed. And more to the point, it had been Mactavish who the previous year had single-handedly talked a mob of Métis out of sacking the Nor'-Wester office.

But in having to employ messengers such as Ritchot to transmit his remonstrances, he found his influence nullified. The turning point at the Métis conference over Ritchot's interview with Mactavish about the roadblock seems to have been reached when Ritchot stated that Mactavish was supporting them. Begg doubted that without an armed force Mactavish would have been able to do anything about the uprising even had his health been good.⁵⁷ But J. J. Hargrave testified in 1874 that he believed that "had Governor Mactavish been in such health that he could leave his house, he would, in spite of everything, have been able so to exert his influence as to break up the affair,"⁵⁸ and Hargrave was probably closer to the truth.

The Company has also been accused of failing to keep its officers in the country (Mactavish) informed of the impending transfer. It was shown in Chapter VII that the

⁵⁷Begg, History of the North-West, I, p. 400.

⁵⁸Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874, p. 185, Hargrave testimony.

Company told Mactavish all it knew as soon as possible. The problem was the Company had not been told much. The idea that the Company was uncommunicative is a persistent one, however, and might have evolved from Mactavish's references to having received no official information on the transfer. His correspondence indicates, though, that by "official" he meant only the Canadian and Imperial Governments. He did not consider the Company an "official" source. Too, there might have been a tendency to confuse this charge with a somewhat ridiculous one by John A. MacDonal'd that the Company failed to prepare the country for the transfer.

Another possible source of this misconception is Mactavish himself, though this delves even further into the realm of idle speculation. Mactavish was being bombarded with information on the transfer--through newspaper articles, private correspondence to Settlers, and word of mouth from visitors to the Settlement--that he was not getting from the Company. In the middle of October, he remarked rather pointedly in a letter to the Company's secretary that "we are told by the last mail that Canada has brought the business of this country to a fine point by putting down the money."⁵⁹ The Company, of course, had not told Mactavish this because Canada had not put down the money, but Mactavish

⁵⁹A.H.B.C., A.12/45, Mactavish probably to W. G. Smith, 13/16 Oct 1869.

might have begun to feel, what with all the fascinating rumors circulating, that he was not being kept up to date by the Company. And if he did feel this way it is doubtful that he kept it to himself. All this is conjecture only, but it is one possible answer to a persistent but unfounded rumor that the Company kept everything secret from its officers in North America.

This subject is tied in with the charge mentioned earlier made by Canadian Prime Minister John A. MacDonald:

For more than a year these negotiations have been actively proceeded with, and it was the duty of the Company to have prepared the people under its rule for the change; to have explained the precautions taken to protect the interests of the inhabitants; and to have removed any misapprehensions that may have existed among them. . . . It appears that no steps of any kind, in that direction, were taken.⁶⁰

But as already indicated, Canada had told neither the Hudson's Bay Company nor, apparently, the British Government, what course it intended to follow regarding its new acquisition. If MacDonald wanted the Company to explain "the precautions taken to protect the interests of the inhabitants " he should have told the Company what those precautions were.

Some have said that Canada could only have communicated what was already public knowledge. But what they

⁶⁰United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, pp. 52-54, Report of a Committee of the Privy Council, signed by MacDonald, 16 Dec. 1869.

could have done, of course, was provide a basis for discriminating between accurate public knowledge and inaccurate public knowledge by communicating to the Settlement in an official form their official positions and specific plans, assuming they had some. By not communicating with the Settlement the Canadian Government left in the realm of "public knowledge" everything from accurate fact to the most grossly inaccurate rumor. It was "public knowledge" of this type that Riel roused the Metis with.

It has also been said that the Canadian Government could do nothing in the way of communicating directly with the Settlement as long as the Company was in control. Such nicety did not stop the Canadian Government from trying to build a road, however, or conduct a survey. And it is certain that had the Canadian Government asked the Company for permission to tell the Settlement officially what Canada's policy after the transfer would be, that the Company would have cooperated fully. As the Company indicated in its correspondence with Mactavish, it would have considered it good business to do so. When all is said and done, Canada's information policy can be laid to one of four possible factors: (1) The Canadian Government itself did not quite know what it was going to do in the North-West; (2) The Government just never thought of communicating with the Settlers; (3) the Dominion Government, swayed by

propaganda from Schultz and the Canadian Party, felt there was no need to communicate with the Settlement since it was ready to leap into Canada's arms; (4) the Canadian Government was merely continuing its policy of pretending that the Company and its government in Red River did not really exist, even after the transfer agreement had rendered this policy pointless. But whatever the reason, the lack of communication and reassurance was regrettable. Equally regrettable were their determined but unjustified attempts to shift the blame elsewhere.

Still, the Canadian Government has come in for some criticism it did not deserve. Many writers have referred to the warnings given the Canadian Government by Archbishop Machray, Mactavish, and Bishop Taché. Machray, on being appointed Bishop of Rupert's Land, had been invited by the Colonial Secretary of the time, Cardwell, to write to the Colonial Office whenever he acquired information on Red River that he thought would interest the Imperial Government.⁶¹ As soon as he heard of the negotiations for the transfer, Machray wrote the new Colonial Secretary, the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, telling him of the urgent need for a detachment of troops at Red River because of the "imminent risk any day of some outbreak leading to the utter prostra-

⁶¹Robert Machray, Life of Robert Machray (London, 1909), p. 168.

tion of law and order."⁶² At the same time Machray said that any agreement should secure to the settlers titles to the lands they had acquired either from the Company or by squatting.

In the autumn of 1868, while visiting Canada, Machray said he "placed myself at the disposal of the Government and I would have gladly furnished it then or afterwards with the fullest information I could or my opinion on any subject connected with the country."⁶³ The Canadian Government, however, "did not take advantage either of the information or of his offer."⁶⁴

Obviously, the only warning mentioned here was that to the Imperial Government, not the Canadian Government, and it was one the Imperial Government had become used to ignoring. What the Canadian Government did not accept was Machray's offer of advice.

On his return from London in May 1869, Mactavish visited Ottawa to offer his advice to the Canadian Government if they wanted it. They did not want it:

His account of the reception he met with was far from being favorable to the authorities there; in fact he accused them of great discourtesy. He was left waiting for an interview for some days, and when it was obtained, I think with some inferior

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Begg's Journal, pp. 503-504, Machray to Sir John Young, 18 Mar 1870.

⁶⁴Machray, Life of Robert Machray (London, 1909), p. 168.

member of the Cabinet, his advice was not asked for as to the mode in which the Government should be assumed or carried on. The Governor was usually cautious and diplomatic, but on this occasion he plainly intimated that they would not find it child's play to rule the North-West. It had in the past been no easy place to govern, and under new rulers he thought the difficulties would increase.⁶⁵

The above writer, Alexander McArthur, had accompanied Mactavish in the latter stages of his return to Red River. Bishop Taché shed further light on the interview. When Taché told Mactavish in the autumn of 1869 that he intended to go to Canada on his way to the Ecumenical Council in Rome and tell them of the situation in Red River, Mactavish apparently said:

My Lord, I wish that you may be successful, but I greatly fear you will lose your time and your trouble. I have just returned from Ottawa, and although I have been for forty years in the country, and Governor for fifteen years, I have not been able to cause any of my recommendations to be accepted by the Government. . . . Those gentlemen are of the opinion that they know a great deal more about this country than we do. . . . However, whether you succeed or not you will have done a conscientious work, and you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have done your duty.⁶⁶

MacDonald denied that Mactavish gave any warning to the Canadian Government in the spring of 1869 and he is apparently quite right, not because MacDonald said Mactavish did not

⁶⁵McArthur, "The Causes of the Rising," p. 2.

⁶⁶Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874, p. 14, Tache testimony; This is Tache's rendering of the conversation; the wording had no doubt been altered a bit in Tache's mind in the five years between it and the investigation wherein the conversation was described.

but because Mactavish on no occasion said he did. Besides, Mactavish had no inkling of, and could not possibly have foreseen, the Rebellion. Mactavish said only that he offered his advice but no one wanted it. MacDonald denied that Mactavish even did this, but the statements of a politician in trouble are highly subject to inaccuracy. Mactavish could not get an audience with MacDonald; he was apparently shunted off to some minor official, and probably MacDonald had little or no idea what Mactavish did say during the interview.

The only actual warnings that the Canadian Government received came rather late in the game, in the fall of 1869. The first of these came from Taché, who visited Ottawa and Montreal on his way to Rome. He got in touch with Sir George Cartier, telling him of the unrest in Red River over the transfer. As Taché testified: "I then communicated to him the general apprehensions which I felt, and he said he knew it all a great deal better than I did, and did not want any information."⁶⁷ It is doubtful that Cartier used those words, or that, as a Sir George Parkin said, Taché was "greeted with a contemptuous laugh."⁶⁸ Still, Cartier apparently rejected Taché's warning. Later, while still in

⁶⁷ Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874, p. 10, Tache testimony.

⁶⁸ Margaret McWilliams, Manitoba Milestones (Toronto, 1928), p. 96.

Canada, Taché received a letter from Mactavish, part of which spoke of increasing trouble in the Settlement:

. . . you no doubt have heard that there has been, and is still, a good deal of agitation here. Unfortunately every Canadian official as he comes in falls into Dr. Schultz's hands, and evidently continues in good accord with him. Our friends, the Canadian half-breeds, shrewdly suspect that no good can come to them from such an alliance, and in consequence rapidly becoming more decidedly opposed to Canada. If the Honorable Wm. McDougall, when he comes here, shows the same leaning, there will be trouble here; and in any case in the interest of your people, I will take the liberty to say that I think it would be of the utmost importance to them, as well as to all concerned, that you should be here when the new order of things is instituted.

Your other duties may render this impossible, but, if so, it is much to be regretted, as taken in time you could control matters which afterwards it would not be so easy to manage. We had, as you well know, our times of excitement, but I have never seen the people here in the restless excited state they are now. None of them I have spoken with can give a clear account of what they wish, but very clearly show that they are suspicious that no good to them is intended. I have done my utmost to point out to them that it must be to the interest of Mr. McDougall or any other who may come as Governor, that his Government should be successful, and that success could not be obtained by injustice to a large section of the governed; that the apparent connexion between Schultz and the officials who have come, simply arose from the Doctor having been kind and accomodating, that in the performance of their duties that sort of thing would not have any effect on them, but I find it useless, their suspicions remain.⁶⁹

Mactavish then went on to describe how some of Dennis's party went out to Oak Point and began staking out land for them-

⁶⁹Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874, pp. 9-10; Mactavish to Taché, Fort Garry, 4 Sep 1869.

selves until they were ejected by the local Métis. Taché sent the part of Mactavish's letter concerning unrest in Red River to Cartier, but Cartier again passed it off lightly, saying the Canadian Government had provided for everything.⁷⁰ Taché construed this to refer to the three hundred Enfiëld rifles that were sent along with McDougall.⁷¹

Mactavish's warning was ignored in the fall for much the same reasons that his advice was rejected in the spring: the Canadian Government was not looking for advice from officers of the Hudson's Bay Company. After having waged a steady and acrimonious war against the Company's rights in the North-West, the Government would not demean itself to the level of taking the advice of the Company's officers, or even treating them with anything approaching respect. The Canadian Government's attitude toward the Company was not one of cooperation but one of studied arrogance. Furthermore, the Canadian Government, as mentioned earlier, had probably become convinced by this time, both by believing its own propaganda and by believing that of the Nor'-Wester and the Canadian Party, that any popular unrest in the Settlement resulted from hatred for the Hudson's Bay Company's rule, and that once that rule was ended and Canada took over all trouble would evaporate.

⁷⁰Lepine Trial, p. 83, Taché testimony.

⁷¹Ibid.; Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874, p. 11. Taché testimony.

Taché's warning was a different matter. Cartier probably did not pay much attention to Taché because Cartier, being a French Catholic himself, recognized a French Catholic nationalist when he saw one. Taché lived for the French Catholic cause. He had come to Red River in 1845 as a priest, had been made Bishop of St. Boniface in 1851,⁷² and had afterward been quite active in Red River trying to strengthen the Church by attracting French Catholic immigrants from French Canada.⁷³ When Taché gave his warning to Cartier, he accompanied it with suggestions that the difficulty could be solved by safeguarding Catholic interests and making concessions to the French Catholic Métis in the Settlement.⁷⁴ This was an approach guaranteed to arouse in Cartier suspicion that Taché was exaggerating the unrest to get the concessions he was asking for. So of the four warnings often mentioned only two were actually given, and the Canadian Government thought it had good reason to doubt even those.

And just as Canada's Government did not get quite as many "warnings" of impending rebellion as has often been

⁷²Hargrave, Red River, pp. 134-37.

⁷³P.A.M., United States: Letters Received by State Department from Agent for Red River Affairs, Taylor to Fish, St. Paul, 20 Jan 1870.

⁷⁴Golden, The French Element in the Red River Settlement, p. 57.

alleged, Canada's Lieutenant-Governor-designate, William McDougall, did not do quite as much damage with his proclamations as is frequently charged. Writers supporting the Rebellion and Scott's execution like to claim that the Provisional Government had been recognized by Mactavish, the English-speaking population, the Canadian Government, and the Imperial Government, so it was really the Canadians who were rebels, not they.⁷⁵ To support this point, much is made both of Mactavish's statements to the four delegates from the convention on 9 February and of "logical consequences" of McDougall's proclamation. The general train of argument is that McDougall's proclamations were accepted by the Settlers as authentic at first, and when the truth became known, it was impossible to restore the old government and laws in the face of the provisional government.⁷⁶ The conclusion is then drawn that there was no government in the territory and that Riel was not only justified but duty-bound to set up a provisional government. This reasoning tends to ignore several facts, one of which was that Mactavish's government was dead already, killed by Riel and his uprising. To pretend that McDougall's proclamations were responsible for the end of Mactavish's government is to ignore the Métis road block in defiance of that government,

⁷⁵Dugas, Le Mouvement des Métis, p. 166.

⁷⁶Begg's Journal, pp. 196-97; Ibid., Intro. by Morton, p. 78.

the Métis occupation of Fort Garry in defiance of that government, the confiscation of the government of Assiniboia's records and books, and the virtual imprisonment of the Governor himself. If all this is ignored, then there is a case for saying McDougall's proclamations deposed Mactavish, but to do so is to isolate things somewhat from the facts. Riel may have been looking for a hiatus in government, but strict legality was not his concern. In the end, he took the position that the Government of Assiniboia's right to rule the country had been forfeited when the Company abandoned "it . . . without its consent to a foreign power."⁷⁷ The hiatus, Riel rationalized, occurred in March 1869, not 1 December.⁷⁸ Riel, in fact, seemed deliberately to avoid the 1 December date by announcing on 7 December that the Provisional Government had been in existence since 24 November.⁷⁹ Riel could not have known whether McDougall's proclamations were legal or not, and he apparently was taking no chances. If he was to replace with his own government the established government because it was decrepit, unable to govern, and had forfeited its right to

⁷⁷Begg's Journal, pp. 218-220, Riel's declaration of 7 Dec 1869.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

govern, he would have to do it before the far from decrepit Canadian Government took over. This construction is supported by his own statements⁸⁰ and is the only logical explanation for Riel's pushing the date of the organization of the Provisional Government back to 24 November. Riel had in November forcibly dethroned Mactavish's government and did not intend to reinstate it. No "abdication" by Mactavish or proclamations by McDougall had any effect on Riel or the general situation unless it was to hurry Riel into proclaiming his Provisional Government and provide him with another link in his growing chain of rationalizations.

But in any case, the Governor and Council of Assiniboia were no more, and blame for their extinction might with a good deal more justice be placed on men other than Mactavish. Mactavish could have gotten the relatively slight additional help needed to crumble the Rebellion at the start from several sources, and the nearest at hand was John Black. Black had remained in the Settlement until March 1870, presiding over the meetings of the Council of Assiniboia at the start of the Rebellion and drafting the letters Mactavish sent to McDougall. Early in 1870, he was appointed by one of the English-speaking parishes as a delegate to the Convention called to frame the bill of rights and form a

⁸⁰Ibid.; Begg's Journal, Intro. by Morton, p. 78.

temporary government. Later he was chosen as one of the three delegates the Settlement was to send to Ottawa with the Bill of Rights. He left for Ottawa around 24 March, and from Ottawa returned to England.⁸¹

Though occasionally resenting Black's living at such a distance from the Settlement, and his stubborn "integrity," Mactavish seems to have regarded Black at least with respect. When Black was appointed to the Bill of Rights Convention and later as a delegate to Ottawa, Mactavish carefully dissociated him from any real involvement in the Métis movement:

Mr. Black had acted as Delegate from one of the parishes in the Settlement at the Convention which sat to frame the Bill of Rights, and form a temporary Government which would be acceptable to all sections of the Colony. This Mr. Black did most reluctantly, and only on account of representations that his presence might be of essential service. The Convention elected Mr. Black as its Chairman. When requested to go to Ottawa as a delegate, he refused for a long time, and was with much difficulty ultimately prevailed on to go by Bishop Tache.⁸²

And in May 1870, defending Black against statements made by William MacDougall, Mactavish said: "As a man of much honor and integrity Mr. Black commands the fullest confidence of myself and Council, and I have no hesitation in assuming

⁸¹United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, pp. 215-17, Mactavish to W. G. Smith, 6 Apr 1870.

⁸²Ibid.

responsibility for any statement he has placed over my signature."⁸³

If Black returned this respect, or concern with the other's reputation, no record of it has come to light. Possibly he was too preoccupied with his celebrated integrity, something that seems often to have been of an easy, selfish, self-indulgent variety. In his conflict with Mactavish over Schultz's exclusion from the courts, for instance, it was easy for him to exercise his integrity since it was Mactavish, not he, who would have to face its consequences. And elsewhere he showed himself far more concerned with himself and his integrity than with the practical task of assisting in running the government of Assiniboia. That he was not at all interested in the latter was demonstrated by the distance at which he placed himself from the Settlement.

During the Rebellion, when Mactavish even though ill was doing all he could to bring his influence to bear no matter what the effects might be on his reputation, Black was interested mainly in isolating himself from the affair. During the Smith meeting, he was only with difficulty persuaded to preside over it during the first day, and refused to do so on the second. As Mactavish indicated, he did not want to be a delegate to the Convention, nor a delegate to

⁸³A.H.B.C., D.10/1, draft of letter from Mactavish to Howe, Fort Garry, 14 May 1870.

Ottawa, and fought off both for quite a while. And in Ottawa Black took almost no part in the discussions with Cartier. But more important, when Mactavish really needed Black's assistance, at the start of the uprising, Black did little more than help Mactavish write some of his correspondence for him. He could have done a good deal more, perhaps.

Another source of help was one that tends to be overrated. Bishop Tache was generally credited with wisdom, moderation, and influence, but influence was the only one of the three in evidence during and after the Rebellion, and that only slightly. Though well aware of the situation in Red River, both through his own observation and through the letters he received from Mactavish, Tache chose deliberately to absent himself in Rome, in spite of requests from Mactavish and Canadian Government officials to return to the Settlement. Tache at one time replied to a Canadian official that: "as they had thought it not proper to give me any answer with with to satisfy the people of Red River, I did not see that my presence at Red River would be productive of any good."⁸⁴ In other words, if he could not get the concessions he was after he would not do anything to calm the unrest. Oscar Malmros, the American Consul in the Settlement and one of the more astute observers of the scene when his vision

⁸⁴ Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874,
p. 11, Tache testimony.

was not clouded by personal or patriotic involvement, reported in a dispatch to the United States State Department that Taché wrote to his vicar in Red River that he would not try to help Canada out of its difficulty, but that if he saw that the rebellion did not have much of a chance he would advocate compromise.⁸⁵

All this fits in with Taché's behavior after he returned to the Settlement. He returned in March 1870, in the middle of the Rebellion, but no attempt seems to have been made subsequent to his arrival to return the governing of the Settlement to the legitimate authority--the Council of Assiniboia. No attempt was made to disband the Métis armed force. And when Riel committed his final act of pillage of the Hudson's Bay Company's stores, no attempt was made to restrain him. Taché's influence, in fact, is evident in only one place--in the demands concerning French language and Catholic education inserted into the fourth "Bill of Rights." Clearly, either Taché's influence was vastly overrated or it was not used in quite the way his supporters might expect. And his testimony before the Select Committee and at the Lepine trial in 1874 revealed his attitudes as narrow and partisan. So quite possibly, Taché's presence in Red River at the start of the Rebellion would

⁸⁵P.A.M., United States: Despatches from Consuls in Winnipeg, Malmros to Davis, 22 Feb 1870.

have changed nothing but the estimates of what his effect on it would have been.

Another source of help was Howe, who has already been adequately discussed in Chapter VIII. A fourth was Donald A. Smith, though Smith was not really in a position to do Mactavish much good; he came too late, carried with him too little authority, and was restricted by Riel to the fort throughout his stay in Red River. Somehow, though, Smith has gained a reputation for having brought some sort of turning point to the Rebellion through the mass meetings in January. The result of the two day meeting in January was a new convention, which in turn resulted in a provisional government backed not only by the French but also, if somewhat reluctantly, by the English. The convention also chose delegates to send to Canada with their demands. All of this appears to have been what Riel had been after since November-- a provisional government backed by both factions and the sending of delegates to deal with the Canadian Government. Smith may have accidentally helped Riel achieve his purpose, but his effect on the Rebellion generally was little or nothing. The Rebellion would have begun to fade in the spring as it did with or without Smith. The buffalo hunters would have gone off to hunt, and the boatmen would have gone off to man the boat brigades, and if Riel had stood in their way by refusing to allow the Company to resume business the

result could only have been unsatisfactory from Riel's point of view. The credit Smith has gotten for having been instrumental in bringing the Rebellion to a halt seems to have resulted less from his actual accomplishment than from his flair for self-dramatization.

Another possible source of assistance for Mactavish and the peaceful part of the Settlement was William McDougall, though this might seem rather odd in view of McDougall's actual performance. The McDougall tilting windmills at Pembina was obviously not the man to help in the situation, but another man might have been---Howe, for instance, or Archibald, who became Governor of Manitoba in 1870. Howe, had he wanted to, might have talked his way past the barricade, and Archibald would certainly have been conciliatory right from the start, when it would have done the most good. And probably neither man would have tried to organize the armed opposition that turned out to be one of Riel's better props. Whatever else McDougall may have been, he showed himself during his month and a half at Pembina to be an arrogant, overbearing bureaucrat with no understanding of the Settlement or the people in it. He demonstrated at Pembina that he was exactly the kind of Lieutenant-Governor the North-West did not need, and if the Rebellion did nothing else worthy of commendation it at least prevented McDougall's

coming to power in Red River and served eventually to rid the Canadian Government of a man whose ability to govern wisely and with justice was exceedingly doubtful.

Some assistance could have come from MacDonald as well. Had MacDonald appointed Mactavish to succeed himself, instead of appointing McDougall, the Rebellion would probably have been averted. When Tache visited Canada in the fall of 1869 to warn the Canadian government of unrest in Red River, he told them the Settlers were worried about who would be made governor, and recommended that Mactavish be appointed.⁸⁶ Tache had earlier discussed the matter with Mactavish, and though Mactavish had objected on the grounds of ill health he said he would take the job if pressed.⁸⁷ The appointment would have had its precedent. James Douglas, Chief Factor in the Western Department, was made Governor of the new Crown Colony of British Columbia by the British Government when the area's status was changed in 1858. Later, when Howe returned from Red River, he tried to find out why Mactavish had not been appointed by the Canadian Government. He found that no one had thought of it, and that so far as anything was known of Mactavish he was believed to be a loyal officer of the Company, devoted to it, and too accustomed to obeying its orders to make a good governor.

⁸⁶Canada: Report of the Select Committee, 1874,
pp. 13-14, Tache testimony.

⁸⁷Ibid.

But actually the comparison between British Columbia and the North-West Territories is not a particularly good one. Britain was enabled to make its logical choice of governor in British Columbia by its lack of grossly inaccurate preconceptions of the Company's employees and of the situation in British Columbia. Canada was plagued with both these preconceptions, as demonstrated by its opinion of Mactavish. And the political situation was different. The choice of McDougall may have been bad, but it was a natural one. McDougall had laid a strong political claim on the job by being in the forefront in the fight for North-West annexation. He may not have demonstrated previously an ability to govern people or a vast territory, and he may have had little knowledge of the country, but such assets are often of secondary importance in making political appointments, and McDougall's appointment was a political one, nothing more, whether to reward him or, as some suggest, to get rid of him.

All of these minor and more tentative factors, along with the major factors already noted, helped bring to national attention one of the oddest "heroes" in Canadian history. One of the more unfortunate aspects of the Red River Rebellion, in fact, was that it was led by Louis Riel. Well-educated, intelligent, young, interested in public

affairs, Riel brought everything to the Rebellion except the most essential ingredient of a true leader--character. He temporarily made up for this drawback with an eloquence that according to those who heard it was a moving thing indeed. It was enough, in any case, to arouse and keep aroused a lot of people who otherwise would probably have stayed at home.

But if his eloquence made him a leader, his lack of courage at the same time made him a follower. Riel was in many ways a puppet of his own rebellion. Just as ^{he} might have been out of control of the situation in the killing of Scott, he was often out of control during the Rebellion generally. His fortunes rose and fell through the winter as his support swelled and shrank. Except on minor occasions when his self-control deserted him, he was careful not to overstep the limit of the power his support gave him; he made no deliberate moves without first testing this support. Where more daring leaders might have strode ahead, dragging their support behind them, Riel tended to get behind his and push. If politics is the art of the possible, then Riel was a master politician, but caution, not courage, was the hallmark of his reign.

Riel personified the Red River Rebellion--bringing it to life and keeping it going--but at the same time more than anyone else discredited it and robbed it of any dignity

it might have had. He carried on generally like a power-mad adolescent. His egotistical self-aggrandizing, arrogant irresponsibility, and lamentable lack of integrity obscured and cast doubt on the patriotic motivations he must also have had. He debased his own futile creation, bringing to the cause he stood for far less than the cause deserved. And it was a cause both meaner and loftier than concern for land or culture. It was meaner because it grew from anger, loftier because it was the universal kind of anger that springs from crushing injustice--the injustice, as the Métis saw it, of their yelping tormentors verging on winning out over them not through right but through paralyzing authority and sheer weight of numbers. This was the cause that Riel betrayed; and in doing so he also betrayed himself. He propelled himself onto the center stage of Canadian history, where he might through judicious leadership have earned for himself a high place in future provincial and national politics. Instead, he was overrun by his ego and lack of self-control and left with an ambiguous reputation entirely subject to prejudice.

And he left injustice of his own making behind him, for if ever a man was kicked when he was down it was William Mactavish by Riel and his Red River Rebellion. Threatened, humiliated and slandered throughout the winter, and drained physically by an illness that proved mortal, Mactavish by

spring had been sapped of most of the little spirit left him by his previous twelve years in the Settlement. Though he may have made mistakes in his governing of the Settlement, he had done his best, and deserved more than he got. And if his best was not enough, it was more than anyone else in a contented but spiritless community gave it. Particularly it was more than Riel or the Canadian Party gave it, yet it was those two who in the end made it impossible for Mactavish to fade out of the Settlement's politics with the dignity and honor he deserved.

At the very least it must be admitted that if Mactavish was much criticized there is another side to the story, Mactavish's side, though it is one that is a trifle harder to find. McDougall, MacDonald, Riel, and the Canadians every step of the way kept a wary eye on their own reputations by reciting loudly and longly their somewhat feeble cases and, as if to draw attention away from themselves, stacking blame in great heaps on anyone else who was handy; Mactavish went his way either too sick or too unaware of the force of idle slander to bother about protecting himself so diligently. His correspondence wasted little space justifying his actions; he seems to have thought they would speak well enough for themselves. Perhaps he realized that those not convinced of his purpose by his actions would remain unconvinced by his argument. In any event, it was on his actions, not his words, that William Mactavish rested his case.

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A P P E N D I X E S

APPENDIX A

The Clan MacTavish, though it dates back to 1230, was never a large or powerful one.¹ Mactavish's grandfather Lachlan MacTavish, was the fourth and last Duke of Argyll, selling his dukeship to a Colonel John Campbell of Barbreck on 31 December 1785. Mactavish was served his heir to the chieftainship of the Clan on 9 May 1808. He died in 1855, and William Mactavish became head of the clan on 8 March 1858. The motto on the clan's coat of arms was Non Oblitus --I am not forgetful.²

The fate of Mactavish's children is not clear. Apparently at least some remained in Red River when Mactavish and his wife returned to England in 1870. In any case Andrew Dougal Mactavish married a local McTavish (note spelling) and together they produced seven children, four girls and three boys.³ The family moved to eastern Canada around the turn of the century, eventually settling in Sherbrooke, Quebec. A news article of 7 March 1851 states that John William Alexander Joseph Mactavish, 24th Chief in line of

¹Donald A. Tod, *The Clan Mactavish of Argyll* (n.p., 1932); a typed copy of this small booklet is in the University of Toronto library.

²Ibid.

³St. Thomas, Ontario, Times-Journal, 7 Mar 1951, in library of Hudson's Bay House, Winnipeg, courtesy of Mrs. Shirlee Smith.

succession of the Clan, had been found in the Queen Mary Veterans Hospital in Montreal, suffering from arthritis. He had been living in Sherbrooke with his mother and two sisters on a small World War I army pension. One of his brothers, George, was also living in Sherbrooke.⁴

⁴Ibid.

APPENDIX B

HBC ORGANIZATION

Under the charter that founded the Hudson's Bay Company in 1670, control of the Company's commercial activities in North America was vested in a Governor, Deputy Governor, and Committee of five Directors, all of whom were chosen annually by the stockholders at a general meeting in London. The Governor and Committee, living in England, ran the Fur Trade through the Governor, or Governor-in-chief, of Rupert's Land, who occupied an office set up soon after the coalition of 1821 between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company. Acting as the Company's chief representative in North America, the Governor-in-chief's authority extended throughout the Company's territory.

The routine business of the Fur Trade was handled by the Fur Trade Council, which met annually at various locations in North America. Until 1860, the Council of the Northern Department assumed a general authority over the Company's entire Fur Trade operation in North America, but following the death of Sir George Simpson the Western and Montreal Departments were made independent of the Northern Department, with that department retaining control only over the relatively unimportant Southern Department.

These Councils, presided over by the Governor-in-chief, reviewed the trade of the past year, planned for the trade

of the ensuing year, and established rules and regulations for conducting the general business of the department or departments involved. Accounts were audited, goods required for the next year's trade were ordered from England, employees of the Company were transferred as necessary, and unusual problems and situations were considered and dealt with. In other words, the Council conducted all the local business of the Fur Trade, subject to the approval of the Board of Directors in London.

PERSONNEL

The Company's employees were classified generally as either "gentlemen" or "servants."

The first were those who had some education and capacity for administration, and were in line for promotion. Normally they entered the service as young men with the rank of apprentice clerks or clerks, and if they proved their value became chief traders and possibly chief factors. Of the rank and file the majority were skilled and unskilled workers, employed either at the posts or as paddlers and oarsmen. Some of the minor posts were in charge of post masters who were successful traders but had no hope of further promotion. There are instances, however, of men in senior position whose letters show the scantiest education. On the whole it seems clear that the company was increasingly looking for men with business capacity, and that it was these who reached the highest positions.¹

There were two ranks of commissioned officer--Chief Factor and Chief Trader. They were paid on a profit-sharing

¹Hargrave Correspondence, Intro. by Glazebrook, pp. xxi-xxii.

plan, an effort to retain the enterprise displayed by the "Nor' Westers" after the merger of the Hudson's Bay Company with the North West Company in 1821. Forty per cent of the net annual profits of the Company was divided into 85 equal shares and distributed among these two ranks of Officers, Chief Factors getting two shares, Chief traders one. Clerks, paid on salary, were, generally speaking, the only non-officers in line for promotion to commissioned status. According to Glazebrook, the aim of every clerk was to become a commissioned officer, and the aim of every officer was to make enough money to retire.² Vacancies in the Chief Factor and Chief Trader ranks were filled from the lower ranks of officers by the annual Council. The Council supposedly could only recommend such promotions, with the final decision resting with the London Board of Directors, but the Board's approval of the Council's recommendations was almost always forthcoming.

Chief Factors regularly attended the Fur Trade Councils, while Chief Traders attended only when invited. Chief Factors were in charge of the most important posts, Chief Traders of the next most important, and clerks or post masters of the minor posts. A district was to some extent autonomous and was usually under a Chief Factor.

²Ibid., p. xx.

APPENDIX C

Dugald progressed almost as well as his brother did in the service of the Company. He was appointed to the Southern Department, first at Moose Factory, where his uncle, J. G. McTavish, was in charge. In 1835, he was moved to Michipicoten, where he stayed for two years, then spent a further two years at Lachine. Following that, he crossed the Rocky Mountains to Fort Vancouver, where he worked from 1839 to 1847. Appointed Chief Trader in 1846, he was assigned to the Hawaiian Islands. He was promoted to Chief Factor in 1851, but remained in the Islands until August 1852, then returned to the West Coast. Aside from several trips to England, he remained on the Pacific slope until 1865, when he was transferred to Montreal.¹ He spent the remainder of his life in the service of the Company in Montreal, temporarily taking charge of the Montreal department in 1870, when Donald A. Smith came out to Red River as a Canadian Commissioner,² and died there of heart disease on 24 May 1871.³ His will provided for a daughter named Ann, for his sister Florence, and for brothers Lockhart and Alexander, both living

¹E. E. Rich (ed.), McLoughlin's Fort Vancouver Letters, 2nd Series, 1839-44 (London, 1943), pp. 397-98.

²A.H.B.C., A.6/43, W. G. Smith to Mactavish, London, 11 Dec 1869.

³McLoughlin's Letters, 2nd Series, pp. 397-98.

in South Australia.⁴ His effects were worth less than four thousand pounds.⁵

Dugald was apparently a highly satisfactory officer. In 1858, when Simpson was proposing the Company place an agent at St. Paul for managing the new supply route through that city, he said that Dugald Mactavish "is in my opinion the best officer we have to act as Agent at St. Paul. He is active and shrewd, and has had great experience in dealing with Americans."⁶ (Part of Dugald Mactavish's time on the west coast had been spent in San Francisco.) A. G. Dallas, at that time in charge of the Western Department, refused to let Dugald go, however, stating that he "is the only one capable of conducting the affairs of the Company in this department."⁷

⁴A.H.B.C., A.36/10, Dugald Mactavish's will, notarized 30 Jun 1871.

⁵Ibid.

⁶A.H.B.C., A.7/2, Simpson to H. H. Berens, Lachine, 30 Jul 1858.

⁷Ibid., Dallas to John Shepherd, Victoria, 1 Sep 1858.

APPENDIX D

Governmental authority in Red River Settlement emanated from the Governor and Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company in London. But though retaining in principle its absolute authority, it pretty much left the actual governing of the Settlement up to the local Governor, or, in the later years, the Governor and Council of Assiniboia.

Sporadic councils were held in Red River before the assumption of the office of Governor by Andrew Bulger, but, as W. L. Morton pointed out, the beginning of a continuous Council of Assiniboia began with that gentleman's arrival in 1822.¹ The span of Company control covered even the years after the Earl of Selkirk's death, because even though the Selkirk heirs retained the Settlement as their personal property, the Company undertook the practical responsibility of caring for it.²

The Company in 1835 bought back full control of Red River, however, and set about broadening and strengthening the Settlement's local Government. The general structure was retained, but a more efficient and more representative character was given it. Before 1835, the Council's membership never exceeded seven, and members were chosen by the Company

¹Morton, Manitoba, p. 69.

²Stanley, Louis Riel, pp. 10-11.

primarily according to their attitude toward the Company.³ In 1835, the membership was raised to fifteen--thirteen local citizens plus the Governors of Rupert's Land and Assiniboia --and they were chosen according to their standing in the community.⁴ The members of the Council still received their commissions from the Board of Directors in London, but this marked the beginning of representative government in Red River in a limited sense--in the only sense, at least, that the Settlement under the Company was ever to know representative government.

Practicality, not idealism, had marked this change in Company policy. Though not prepared to grant representative government, just as the Settlement might not have been able to afford it, the Company recognized that if the growing colony was to be kept under any kind of control, if order of any kind was to be maintained, it would have to be done by governing at least to some extent with the consent of the governed.

In the new system, the Governor of Rupert's Land, or in his absence, the Governor of Assiniboia convened the Council and presided over its sittings. Neither carried more weight

³Oliver, Canadian North-West, I, pp. 35-36.

⁴Ibid.

in the Council than any other members, having only one vote to cast, and no veto power. Measures took effect from the moment they were proclaimed, and though the Governor and Committee in London had a veto power they almost never used it.

Governor of Rupert's Land George Simpson, presiding over the initial meeting of this expanded Council on 12 February 1835, proposed and had passed several other measures, including a new court system comprised of four judicial districts, a beefed-up part-time police force of sixty men, provision for a new jail and court house, and an import duty to pay for it all.⁵ Four years later, the judicial system was filled out by providing for a Recorder, or chief judge, to preside over the Settlement's courts.⁶

⁵Oliver, Canadian North-West, I, pp. 266-274, Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 12 Feb 1835.

⁶Ibid., pp. 283-87, Minutes of Council of Assiniboia, 13 Jun 1839.

APPENDIX E

Before 1835, justice in Red River was administered by a single justice of the peace. In that year a system of judicial districts and petty courts was inaugurated, appeals from the petty courts and more important cases being handled by "the supreme tribunal of the Colony," the Council of Assiniboia.¹ All justices of the peace attached to the petty courts were to be nominated by the Governor of Assiniboia and approved by the Governor and Committee.

In 1839 this judicial system was augmented by a General Quarterly Court, which replaced the Council of Assiniboia as the Settlement's "supreme tribunal." This court met four times a year, handled all criminal cases and civil cases concerning more than five pounds, and provided a jury trial, the juries to be made up according to the nationalities of the principals involved. Presiding over this General Quarterly Court was to be the Recorder of Rupert's Land, a new position to be filled by a trained lawyer, established because of the increasing need of the Settlement for a firmer foundation for the administration of its law.²

¹Garrloch, Correction Line, pp. 114-18.

²Hargrave, Red River, pp. 85-92; Nor'-Wester, Saturday, 14 Sep 1861.

APPENDIX F

Andrew McDermot was born in Roscommon, Ireland, around 1789 or 1790 and came over with the first or second shipload of Selkirk Settlers in 1811. A year later, at Norway House, he married a Sarah McNab,¹ described by the Nor'-Wester as "the daughter of the chief whose tribe's hunting grounds covered this region."² There is some room to doubt the daughter's origin, since this implies the chief's name was McNab, but McDermot's wife almost certainly had Indian blood in her to some extent.³ The marriage eventually resulted in fifteen children, nine daughters and six sons.

McDermot was appointed to the Council of Assiniboia on 20 March 1839, and served as Councillor for several years.⁴ By this time McDermot, one of the first and most prominent of the Settlement's free traders, had made himself "the wealthiest man in the settlement."⁵ He was described about this time as "a free, good, hearty, sociable gentleman, who has an open house for friend or stranger,"⁶ and as being able to

¹Healy, Women of Red River, p. 131.

²Nor'-Wester, Friday, 1 Nov 1861.

³Morton, History of the Canadian West, p. 866.

⁴Oliver, Canadian North-West, I, p. 62.

⁵Healy, Women of Red River, p. 128.

⁶Ibid.

"talk more and faster than any half dozen men I ever met before"7 Sheriff Ross said "there was no better judge of men and horses in Red River, or any man . . . his equal in . . . humor and shrewdness and the power of making money."

⁷Ibid.

APPENDIX G

The Hudson's Bay Company notified the British Colonial Office on 23 November 1869 that the Deed of Transfer had received the Seal of the Company and they were ready to proceed with the transfer.¹ But Canadian Prime Minister John A. MacDonald had changed his mind. He had heard about the Metis rising and preventing the entry of McDougall in Red River, and he immediately saw that it was an extremely inopportune time to take over the territory. He cabled ahead to John Rose in London asking him to hold up the transfer and the payment of the money, then followed the cable up with his reasons. Canada, he said, was entitled to peaceful possession. Besides, since the Canadian Government would not be able to extend its own authority into the territory, it would be better, he said, if the Hudson's Bay Company government remained.² As he explained more fully in a Report to the Privy Council dated 16 December 1869:

The resistance of these misguided people is evidently not against the sovereignty of Her Majesty or the government of the Hudson's Bay Company, but to the assumption of the Government by Canada. They profess themselves satisfied to remain as they are, and that if the present system of Government were allowed to

¹United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 181, Lampson to Rogers, London, 23 Nov 1869.

²Morton, Manitoba, p. 131.

continue, they would at once disperse to their homes.³

It is obvious, then, that the wisest course to pursue is, for the present, to continue the authority of the Company, which the Insurgents affect to respect, while steps are being taken to remove the misapprehensions which exist and to reconcile the people to the change.⁴

The initial reaction of the British Colonial Office was a decidedly negative one. Colonial Secretary Earl Granville wrote to Sir John Young:

Throughout these negotiations, it has never been hinted that the Company is to be bound to hand over its Territory in a state of tranquillity. Rather its inability to secure that tranquillity, and the dangers resulting from that inability to the neighbouring Colony, is taken for granted as a reason why its responsibilities should be adopted by Canada.⁵

Pointing out that the disturbance was caused by McDougall's presence, Granville went on:

But the Canadian Government having, by this measure given occasion to an outbreak of violence in a Territory which they have engaged to take over, now appear to claim the right of postponing indefinitely, the completion of their engagements to the Company, and of imposing on her Majesty's Government the responsibility of putting down the resistance which has thus arisen.⁶

Sir John Young in his letter of 27 November had

³United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, pp. 52-54, Report of a Committee of the Privy Council, signed by MacDonald.

⁴Ibid.

⁵United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, pp. 170-72, Despatch, Earl Granville to Sir John Young, London, 30 Nov 1869.

⁶Ibid.

suggested that Canada's declining to accept the territory immediately left the responsibility for the administration of affairs up to the Imperial Government when the Company surrendered the territory.⁷ Granville pointed out, however, that since the Rupert 's Land Act provided that the surrender would become null and void if Canada did not take over the territory within a month of the Company's surrender:

14. You will see, therefore, that it is impossible for Her Majesty to accept the surrender of the Hudson's Bay Company's Territory, unless it is certain within a month to be transferred to Canada.

15. Unless, therefore, it is to be so transferred, it must remain under the Jurisdiction of the Company, and liable to all the disorders which are to be expected when the prestige of a Government long known to be inadequate, is shaken by the knowledge that it is also expiring, and by the appearance, however well intended, of its successor.⁸

The Company joined in with similar sentiments, first on 28 December 1869, then in more detail on 21 January 1870:

It is with great deference that the Committee venture to express their doubts as to the policy of such a course. Lord Granville is aware that for many years they have felt that their authority, however sufficient in former times and under widely different circumstances, had become too [sic] weak for the maintenance of order and the protection of the peace of the Settlement. As far back as in August, 1863, Sir Edmund Head communicated to Her Majesty's Government the opinion of the Committee that the time had come when it was expedient that the

⁷United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 12, Despatch, Young to Granville, Ottawa, 27 Nov 1869.

⁸Ibid., p. 172, Despatch, Granville to Young, London, 30 Nov 1869.

executive and judicial authority over the Settlement should be vested in officers deriving such authority directly from the Crown, and exercising it in the name of Her Majesty; and again, as lately as in February last, in reply to Lord Granville's question, "What course the Company would propose to take for securing that life and property are adequately protected, and international obligations duly performed in their Territory so long as they remain responsible for its government?" I was instructed by the Committee to reply, that they believed that the most satisfactory plan which could be adopted would be the erection of the Settlement into a Crown Colony, and that they were prepared to recommend to their Shareholders the adoption of measures which would enable Her Majesty's Government to take that step without casting any pecuniary burden upon the National Exchequer. It can hardly be necessary for me to remark that the considerations which led to these expressions of opinion on the part of this Committee, and which Earl Granville's question shows to have been present in his Lordship's mind also, have acquired additional force under existing circumstances. The moral authority of the Company's Government has been greatly weakened by the announcement that a sale of the Territory to the Dominion had been agreed to; its physical weakness has unfortunately been demonstrated by the recent occurrences; and a further complication has been introduced into the affairs of the Settlement by the two Proclamations, dated 1st and 2nd December respectively, in which Mr. McDougall announces that the transfer of the Territory to Canada has been completed, and that he has been appointed Lieutenant-Governor, and by which he also removes Governor Mactavish from his post, and takes upon himself the responsibility of the Administration. These Proclamations had not reached this country when your Despatch of the 8th was written. They strengthen the conviction of the Committee that the proposal that the Company should undertake the provisional administration of the country in its present excited state, and should endeavour to restore tranquillity and to prepare the way for the transfer which has given occasion for the excitement, is one which they cannot entertain unless they are informed that it is the intention of Her Majesty's Government to arm the Company with powers adequate to so arduous a task.⁹

⁹Ibid., p. 197, Northcote to Rogers, London, 21 Jan 1870.

Northcote went on to ask if the British Government intended to supply the Company with troops to pacify the settlement with. He also suggested that, in all events, the British Government accept the Company's surrender of the territory, obtaining the necessary change in the law from Parliament to enable them to keep the territory for longer than one month.

But if the Imperial Government and the Company had stronger arguments, Canada was in a stronger position. There was no way for Britain to force Canada to take over the North-West if she did not want to do so. The only course left was either to leave the title in the hands of the Company or, assuming the legislative hurdles could be leaped quickly, raise the territory into a Crown Colony. But it had not fought off repeated suggestions over the past decade to undertake the expense of installing a Crown Colony in the middle of the North American prairie to capitulate at the last moment. The North-West remained with the Company, which was to say it remained with the Metis.

Soon, however, the machinery of the transfer was again being started up. But this time, the Imperial Government took a more active interest in Canada's handling of the matter. On 23 March, 1870, Earl Granville wrote to Sir John Young as follows:

As the season approaches at which it will be possible to despatch troops to the Red River Settlement, I find myself embarrassed by the want of explicit information respecting the views of your Government on matters which ought to be decided before Her Majesty's Government takes part in such an expedition. Among these are: the time at which the Canadian Government will be prepared to take over the Hudson Bay Company's territory; the arrangements for governing it during the short interval between its surrender by the Company and its annexation to Canada; the time of its union with Canada; the apportionment of the cost of the expedition, if it should be found absolutely necessary to send one; and the arrangements for provisioning the Imperial Troops during the four months of their sojourn in the Red River Settlement.¹⁰

If the letter suggested that Canada had learned nothing from the previous effort to transfer the territory, it showed that the Imperial Government had. Throughout this second attempt, the Imperial Government kept a tight rein on the situation. W. G. Smith wrote to Mactavish on 9 April 1870:

. . . I am directed to inform you that acting upon the suggestion of Her Majestys [sic] Government the Governor and Committee have this day appointed Sir John Young Bart: Governor of Rupert's Land to exercise and to perform either by himself or by an officer appointed by him in that behalf all the powers and duties which now [and] hereafter may be by law exercised and performed by their Governors.¹¹

On 23 April, Earl Granville telegraphed to Young

¹⁰Ibid., p. 176, Despatch, Granville to Young, London, 23 Mar 1870.

¹¹A.H.B.C., A.6/43, W. G. Smith to Mactavish, London, 9 Apr 1870; in being made Governor of Rupert's Land, Young was only taking over the responsibilities more nearly associated with the Governor of Assiniboia, since Young would have nothing to do with the Company's commercial operation, the primary concern of the Governor of Rupert's Land.

giving the conditions on which the military expedition would be allowed to advance. The most important of these was that Sir John Rose, of the London firm of Morton, Rose and Company, which was representing Canada in the financial end of the transfer, "be authorized to pay 300,000£ at once, and Her Majesty's Government to be at liberty to make transfer before end of June."¹² A week and a half later, Young telegraphed back that "Instruction will be sent to Rose to-day by Telegram to pay over 300,000£. Imperial Government are at liberty to make the transfer of the Territory any time before the end of June. But Canada wishes it to be made not immediately, nor without giving due notice by Telegram."¹³

Rose on the same day, 4 May 1870, notified Granville that he had received instruction to pay over the money and was ready to do so.¹⁴ Three days later the Company sent the Deed of Surrender to the Colonial Office,¹⁵ and two days after that the Colonial Office told Rose that they had received the Deed of Surrender, that they were retaining it without

¹²United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 177, Telegram, Granville to Young, 23 Apr 1870.

¹³Ibid., p. 131, Telegram, Young to Granville, 4 May 1870.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 221, Rose to Granville, London, 4 May 1870.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 213, Lampson to Rogers, 7 May 1870.

accepting it formally, and that Rose should pay over the 300,000£ to the Company immediately.¹⁶ By the next day, 10 May, the Company had acknowledged receipt of the money,¹⁷ according to a despatch from Granville to Young, though another letter from the Company said it did not receive the money until 11 May.¹⁸ The Crown formally accepted the Company's surrender on 22 June 1870,¹⁹ and the transfer to Canada took place on 15 July 1870.²⁰

¹⁶Ibid., p. 222, Holland to Rose, London, 9 May 1870.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 179, Despatch, Granville to Young, London, 10 May 1870.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 214, Lampson to Rogers, London, 11 May 1870; the money was actually paid over to the Company by Messrs. Baring Brothers & Co., and Messrs. Glyn, Mills, Currie & Co.; United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, p. 222, W. G. Smith to Rose, 11 May 1870.

¹⁹A.H.B.C., B.235/c/1, W. G. Smith to officer in charge of Fort Garry, London, 2 Jul 1870.

²⁰Lamb, Thunder in the North, p. 5.

APPENDIX H

The Fort Garry that Riel occupied stood in the north-west angle formed by the juncture of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. As built in 1835, the fort was a rectangle spreading 240 feet from north to south, and 280 feet from east to west. The ten-foot-high exterior walls were of limestone apparently quarried from the river bank. Each corner had circular bastions pierced for guns. Several years after its erection, an addition was made on the north end to enclose quarters for the resident Governor of Assiniboia.

The high walls of this added enclosure were constructed of large solid square oak logs, laid horizontally in the form of crib work, the space between the outer and inner oak walls being filled with earth . . . it was at this time that the gateway still remaining in the small Fort Garry Park was erected.¹

The interior of the fort was crowded with buildings, including the officers' and employees' residential quarters, warehouses and retail store, mostly built of wood. There were four gates. The large main gate faced to the south, not far from the banks of the Assiniboine River. At the opposite end of the fort was the smaller gate used as a private entrance by the Governor of Assiniboia. There were two postern gates, both located in the east wall, through the most southerly of

¹Bell, "The Old Forts of Winnipeg," p. 36.

which Thomas Scott was led to his execution.²

Sir George Simpson, concerned possibly with the increasing turbulence of the French population, built Lower Fort Garry, "the Stone Fort," in 1831 because he felt the Company required a fort in a more secure position than that of (Upper) Fort Garry. Lower Fort Garry's location on the west bank of the Red near the rapids fifteen miles below the Assiniboine, imbedded in the English part of the Settlement away from the French element, seemed to Simpson to provide a much more defensible situation. It was also, he pointed out, less subject to floods. Simpson intended to move the Company's Red River headquarters to the new fort.³

But he was overruled by the Company. The London office felt the confluence of the rivers was a far better business location.⁴ Apparently Sir George later changed his mind on the subject, deciding that if the new Fort Garry, that built in 1835, was built on higher ground it would be suitable as the main depot for the entire country. Whether Simpson also changed his mind on the strategic inferiority of Upper Fort Garry, or decided the danger from the French was

²Ibid.; Young, Manitoba Memories, p. 189; Hargrave, Red River, p. 186; Nor'-Wester, Friday, 15 Mar 1861.

³Bryce, Hudson's Bay Company, p. 353.

⁴Garrioch, Correction Line, p. 94.

lessening, or just decided there was no point in continuing the argument, is another question.

APPENDIX I

It is with much concern I have to say that among a certain portion of the half-breed population here there prevails a degree of excitement at the prospect of your arrival in the country, which seems to make it necessary that in coming into the Settlement you should use great circumspection; and it is for the purpose of pointing attention to that apparent necessity, that I send you this communication.

For some weeks past rumours have been reaching me, through more or less reliable channels, of dissatisfaction among the French half-breeds with the recent arrangements; but believing, as I then did, that these feelings had no very deep root, I indulged the hope that they might pass away. But in this respect, I am deeply pained to say, I have been disappointed, and that, within the last few days, the feeling of discontent has manifested itself in such a manner as to create serious apprehensions for the result. After interfering with the surveying operations of Colonel Dennis, these people, in considerable numbers, have combined for the avowed purpose of stopping your entrance into the Settlement, and with that view they have actually taken up permanent positions on the road by which, in the usual course of travel, you would advance.

Ever since matters began to assume a serious aspect, the conduct of these people has been, I may say, constantly engaging the earnest deliberations of the Local Authorities, but although every effort has been made which the Council deemed prudent or practicable for bringing these misguided people to reason and for procuring their peaceable dispersion, yet I am sorry to say that hitherto all has been without effect, and that the difficulty--the serious and now somewhat alarming difficulty--still remains unsolved, as to how you are to be effectually protected from molestation in approaching the Settlement.

From Colonel Dennis I learn that, by different hands, he has been lately sending you Reports upon the state of matters here, and that in his last communication he had advised you to remain at Pembina until you should have ascertained through reliable intelligence from this, that, by some means or other, the course had been cleared so as to make it prudent for you to come on. It appears to me

that, under the circumstances, the advice so tendered by Colonel Dennis was sound and judicious, and it relieved my mind from much anxiety to hear that Officer express so confident a belief that you would be inclined to act upon it; although I cannot but add that I fully share in his feeling of mortification at being so circumstanced as to be constrained to counsel such a course.

I have not myself seen Colonel Dennis's communications to you on the subject of these unfortunate occurrences, but he has been kind enough to read them to some Members of the Council for the purpose of enabling them to judge of the accuracy and completeness of his information; and upon their assurance, I have no hesitation in saying that the contents of the Colonel's communications to you may be relied upon as conveying in the main a correct narrative of the occurrences to which they refer, and a fair representation of the popular sentiment throughout the Settlement.

The question which now presses itself upon every mind is, what is to be done to secure you peaceable entrance into the Settlement. So far, all our expedients have failed, and unless the efforts of a temporizing character which are still being earnestly used for the dispersion of the malcontents succeed, it is to be feared that your coming into the Settlement at the present moment would not be free from considerable danger.

From Colonel Dennis's Despatches and this Letter you will derive as full and accurate a knowledge of the position of affairs here as, I believe, can very well be given in writing, and having satisfied myself that you are acquainted with all the material circumstances of the case, I think that you are now in possession of the principal data for enabling you to determine the important question of your movements, and I need not say that I shall most anxiously await your decision.

But without of course, in any way meaning to prescribe the line to be pursued, I may be permitted to add that to those who with myself have been deliberating upon the most advisable steps to be taken in circumstances of so embarrassing and so critical a nature, there have been suggested three courses for meeting the difficulty as it now stands.

The first is that there happily being, among even the French half-breeds, a considerable element of well-disposed persons, there should be carefully selected from that section a body of from twenty to thirty men, who, mounted and armed, should proceed to Pembina and escort you to your residence in the Settlement by a round-about road, which would keep you entirely clear of the roads on which the malcontents are known to have taken up their positions.

The second is that of making a public call upon the whole loyal portion of the Settlement to turn out in the cause of order, and to the number of say 300 unarmed able-bodied men--if such a force could be mustered--proceed to Pembina, and escort you into the Settlement by the usual route, whether the malcontents remain upon it or not.

And the third is, that you should remain at Pembina and await the issue of conciliatory negotiations, with a view of procuring a peaceable dispersion of the malcontents.

Now, with respect to the first of these courses, it is in my opinion open to the grave objection, that, even if it were to issue in your safe arrival amongst us, it would obviously involve a virtual acknowledgement of the ascendancy of these lawless people, and would have a direct tendency to inspire them with fresh courage in the prosecution of their designs; and, besides, I am strongly of opinion that, under present circumstances, your personal safety could not be sufficiently provided for by the attendance of so small a body of men as that proposed; a body large enough to provoke a collision, but probably far from strong enough successfully to meet it.

The second is one which the Local Authorities have all along been pondering, but one which, as in somewhat similar emergencies on former occasions, they have hitherto shrunk from adopting, partly from a misgiving as to the extent and the spirit of the response to such a call as that proposed, and partly also, but principally, from an apprehension of precipitating a collision between different sections of the people, which might plunge, not only the Settlement, but the whole Territory, into all the disasters of a war of races and religions--a war in which the legitimate object for which it had been begun would probably soon be lost sight of, and passion and prejudice alone animate the minds of those engaged in it.

To the Council and myself it appears that, under present circumstances, the third proposal is the only one that can be regarded as prudent or practicable; and it is therefore our opinion that you should remain at Pembina and await the issue of conciliatory negotiations, in the hope of procuring a peaceable dispersion of the malcontents.

I have only to add that, although this Letter proceeds ostensibly from myself, it embodies the views of the Council of Assiniboia, and that at a Meeting of the Council to-day, held for the express purpose, it was unanimously adopted as to the communication which I should immediately make you.

Earnestly hoping that ere long some peaceable solution of all these difficulties may be arrived at, I remain,
etc.¹

¹United Kingdom: Correspondence Relative to the Recent Disturbances in Red River, pp. 16-18, Mactavish to McDougall, Fort Garry, 30 Oct 1869.

APPENDIX J

He was received with a good deal of politeness when he presented himself; Mactavish said that he had seen on Riel's arrival in the country that he was a young man whose high education would enable him to render service to the community. "I knew your father well," he said; "he was an intelligent and able man." "I am happy," Riel replied, "that you remember my father so well, and I thank you for your words of praise. I will try to imitate him and, as he did, render service to my country, at least as much as circumstances permit."

"I believe," said the Governor (coming to the point), "that your compatriots are wrong in getting disturbed over the survey, and in thinking that threatening the Government with an insurrection will prevent its establishment here. Would it not be better for your friends to wait in peace and give the Canadian Government a chance to prove itself? There will always be time for you to complain to Ottawa."

Excellency, said Riel, it is not the Metis who are at fault. I do not have time this evening to examine where the responsibility lies for the disorder that reigns at this moment; but this is what I have to say. The English colonists understand nothing of the situation. They seem wholly indifferent to the question that is raised today. They would be willing to let the Canadian Government establish itself here, on the chance of questioning the conditions later if they were going badly, but this is not the way we choose to do it. It is, it seems to me, only simple prudence to prevent the wolf's entry into the sheep-pen; it looks to us as if it would be easier to keep the wolf outside in the first place than to have to throw it out later. To us, the Canadian Government is a wolf, and to sum up, we are determined to prevent its entry into our country, where it has no right. We remain loyal subjects of her Majesty, but we refuse point-blank to recognize the authority of Canada.¹

¹Dugas, Le Mouvement des Métis, pp. 44-46.

APPENDIX K

MACTAVISH'S PROCLAMATION OF 16 NOV 1869

Whereas I William Mactavish Governor of Assiniboia have been informed that a meeting is to be held to-day of persons from the different Districts of the Settlement for the ostensible purpose of taking into consideration the present political condition of the Colony and for suggesting such measures as may appear to be best adapted for meeting the difficulties and dangers connected with the existing state of public affairs;

And whereas I deem it advisable at this conjuncture to place before that meeting as well as before the whole body of the people what it appears to be necessary for me to declare in the interests of public order and of the safety and welfare of the settlement. Therefore I notify all whom it concerns that during the last few weeks large bodies of armed men have taken up positions on the public high road to Pembina and contrary to the remonstrances and protests of the public authorities have committed the following unlawful acts:

First. They have forcibly obstructed the movements of various persons travelling on the public highway in the peaceable prosecution of their lawful business and have thus violated that personal liberty which is the undoubted right of all Her Majesty's subjects.

Secondly. They have unlawfully seized and detained on the road at La Riviere Salle in the Parish of St. Norbert goods and merchandise of various descriptions and of very considerable value belonging as well to persons coming into the Colony as to citizens already settled here and carrying on their business in the Settlement thereby causing great loss and inconvenience not only to the owners of those goods but as has formally been complained of also to the carriers of the same and possibly involving the whole Colony in a ruinous responsibility.

Thirdly. They have unlawfully interfered with the public mails both outgoing and incoming and by thus tampering with the established means of communication between the Settlement and the outside world have shaken public confidence in the security of the mails and given a shock

to the trade and commerce of the Colony of which the mischievous effects cannot now be fully estimated.

Fourthly. Not only without permission but in the face of repeated remonstrances on the part of the Hudson Bay Company's officer in immediate charge of Fort Garry they have in numbers varying from about sixty to one hundred and twenty billeted themselves upon that Establishment under the plea of protecting it from a danger which they alleged was known by themselves to be imminent but of which they have never yet disclosed the particular nature--they have placed armed guards at the gates of an establishment which every stick and stone of it is private property--in spite of the most distinct protestations against such disregard of the rights of property they have taken possession of rooms within the Fort--and although they have there as yet committed no direct act of violence to person or property beyond what has been enumerated yet by their presence in such numbers with arms for no legitimate purpose that can be assigned they have created a state of excitement and alarm within and around the Fort which seriously interferes with the regular business of the establishment.

Fifthly. A body of armed men have entered the Hudson Bay Company's Post at Pembina where certain Gentlemen from Canada with their families were peaceably living, and, under threats of violence have compelled them to quit the establishment at a season of the year when the rigors of winter were at hand and forced them to retire within American Territory.

And in the last place they have avowed it as their intention in all those unlawful proceedings to resist arrangements for the transfer of the Government of this country which have been made under the sanction of the Imperial Parliament and thus virtually set at defiance the Royal Authority. Instead of adopting those lawful and constitutional means which under the enlightened rule of Her Most Gracious Majesty our Queen are sufficient for the ultimate attainment of every object that rests upon reason and justice the persons who have been engaged in committing those unlawful deeds have resorted to acts which directly tend to involve themselves in consequences of the gravest nature and to bring upon the Colony and the country at large the evils of anarchy and the horrors of war.

Therefore in the interests of law and order in behalf of all the securities you have for life and property and in a word for the sake of the present and the future welfare of the Settlement and its inhabitants--I again earnestly and emphatically Protest against each and all of these unlawful acts and intents--I charge those engaged in them before they are irretrievably and hopelessly involved immediately to disperse themselves and peaceably to depart to their habitations or to their lawful business under the pains and penalties of law and whatever in other respects may be the conclusions of those who meet to deliberate upon the present critical and distracted state of public affairs I adjure you as citizens having the interests of your country and your kindred at heart to ratify and proclaim with all the might of your united voices this public notice and protest and so avert from the country a succession of evils of which those who see the beginning may never see the end.

You are dealing with a crisis out of which may come incalculable good or immeasurable evil and with all the weight of my official authority and all the influence of my individual position let me finally charge you to adopt only such means as are lawful and constitutional rational and safe.

Given under my hand and seal at Fort Garry--this Sixteenth day of November, 1869.

W. MacTavish
Governor of Assiniboia¹

¹Begg's Journal, pp. 167-69.