GREAT STORIES OF CANADA

Revolt in the West

THE STORY OF THE RIEL REBELLION

BY EDWARD McCOURT

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REVOLT IN THE WEST

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1. Exile's Return

On a June morning in the year 1884 four horsemen rode into the little mission settlement of St. Peter's in the Sun River country of Montana. The men were strangers in the settlement. They had come, they said, to see the schoolteacher of the Mission, a man named Louis Riel.

Someone told them that the schoolteacher was at Mass —the day was Sunday—but the strangers were insistent. "We've come from a long way north," their leader said. "Up in Canada. We must see Louis at once."

A boy went to the church and summoned Riel. He came unwillingly, angry because he had been disturbed at his prayers. But when he saw the men who had come all the way from Canada to talk to him his anger vanished and his face lit up with a strange joy.

"Gabriel!" he cried, and he embraced the sturdy bearded leader of the little party. For the leader was Gabriel Dumont, his cousin whom he hadn't seen for many years.

Riel didn't know the other members of the party. But they weren't strangers, they were his own people. And before anyone said a word he knew why they had ridden seven hundred miles from the Métis settlement along the banks of the South Saskatchewan River to seek him out.

They had come with the summons he had long been expecting. His people, the Métis, away up there in the North-West Territories of Canada, were in trouble. Serious trouble. They thought that their rights to the land they had lived on for many years were being threatened by the incoming white settlers from Eastern Canada, and the Canadian Government would not listen to their pleas and petitions. Fifteen years before, when they were living in what is now the Province of Manitoba, the Métis had been in the same kind of trouble. But then they had stood up to the Canadian Government because Louis Riel had been there to tell them what to do.

True, Riel had been driven out of the country for his part in the fight. For years, before settling down to his teaching job in the Indian Mission of St. Peter's, he had been a wanderer in exile. But even in exile he had known that some day he would go back to Canada and again be a great man among the Métis. Now the day had come, and his spirit was exalted.

Riel listened quietly while Gabriel Dumont explained why his people had sent for him. The Métis, and many of the white settlers of the North-West Territories as well, wanted Riel to lead them in their fight for security and justice. No one, Dumont said, could rally the Métis into a united body the way Louis could, no one could talk to the Canadian Government with his clarity and eloquence and power. He might encounter difficulties—danger even—when he returned, for many Canadians had neither forgotten nor forgiven some of the things he had done fifteen

years before. "But we need you, Louis," Gabriel Dumont said simply. "Will you come?"

Riel's mind was made up on the instant, but he did not give his answer at once. "First," he said, "I must pray." Then he went back into the little Mission church and gave thanks to God for this great hour, in which was fulfilled the promise made to him long ago. For he sincerely believed that an angel of the Lord had once appeared to him in a vision and said, "Rise up, Louis *David* Riel. You have a mission to carry out." Ever since the time of the vision he had called himself David, after the great king of Israel. For David, too, had lived for many years in exile; and had returned at last to rule in power and greatness over his people.

There was much bustle and excitement in Riel's household when Louis told his wife that they must leave at once for the far-off North-West Territories. Marguerite was happy at the Mission, even though the Riels were forced to share a small cabin with another family; and she dreaded the long journey north because she knew it would be hard on the two little children. But she was a good obedient wife who did not dream of arguing with her husband. She was sure that Louis was a great man; she believed him when he said that he saw visions and talked to God through His angels. So the poor scanty household goods were packed in an old Red River cart, goodbyes said to the friendly folk of the Mission, and the little party headed north towards the Saskatchewan River country.

The journey was long and hard, but to Louis Riel it was

a thrilling and joyous experience. His wild Indian blood —he was one-eighth Cree—responded to the windswept freedom of the vast region of mountain and plain through which the party passed. He breathed deep the rich scents of the good clean earth in early morning, soaked the hot sun of noonday into every fibre of his body, and watched with childish joy the stars come out at night above the upflung shoulders of a far-off mountain range. He sat with his good companions around the nightly campfire, ate heartily the simple food prepared by the faithful Marguerite, and fell asleep, wrapped in a buffalo robe, wondering how he had for so long endured the confinements of Mission life. Even the hideous racket made by the ungreased wooden axle of the Red River cart sounded sweet in his ears. The Métis were a people forever on the move; and to them the sound of the Red River cart was a kind of wild music that set the blood racing in expectation of new scenes and new adventures.

The party passed out of the mountain country and followed the Missouri River downstream as far as Fort Benton, a trading-post at the head of river navigation. From Fort Benton great ox-teams freighted supplies north into Canada. This was the last summer that the ox-teams moved north in any great number; for the newly-built Canadian Pacific Railway was soon to drive most of the freighters out of business. From Fort Benton, too, the American whiskey-runners made quick dashes across the border with their illicit brew. In recent years, though, the North-West Mounted Police had patrolled the border so closely that the

once great stream of whiskey flowing into Canada had dried to a mere trickle.

In Fort Benton Riel spent an hour or two with his good friend the parish priest. The priest was greatly distressed when he learned why Riel was going north. He warned him that his return to Canada might cause great trouble.

"Louis," he said, "if you go to Canada you will fight. And you cannot win—not with a handful of men against great armies. And then things will be worse than ever for your people. And for you."

Riel smiled to himself. He respected the parish priest but he did not intend to follow his advice. The priest couldn't understand that the summons to go north had come from God. There could be no turning back.

So once again the little party moved slowly on across the great Montana plains, lush green in the warm mid-June sun, and over the border into Canada. Gabriel Dumont had been afraid of trouble at the border, but no one opposed their entry, no one asked them questions. Not even the red-coated horsemen of the North-West Mounted Police, whom Riel now saw for the first time.

Steadily they pushed north over deep-rutted trails carved by the freight wagons, across the great Saskatchewan plains. Lonely windswept empty plains. But soon, Riel knew, they would be swarming with white men, for already the Canadian Pacific Railway had thrust its iron tracks into the sides of the Rockies, far to the west. Settlers always followed the railroad; they spread far and wide on both sides of the track. Soon the newcomers would be pushing boldly into

the Métis settlements along the South Saskatchewan and claiming as their own the country which the Métis had opened up years before. Louis felt that his people had sent for him not a moment too soon.

Three weeks after leaving the St. Peter's Mission in Montana, Riel saw in the distance the great bluffs of the South Saskatchewan River, and soon afterwards the littl huddle of buildings and the straggling row of log cabin running a mile or two along the river bank, that togethe made up the settlement of Batoche, the most importan Métis centre in the North-West Territories. The peopl had been warned well in advance of his coming. Whe the party was still several miles from Batoche nearly hundred horsemen rode out to meet it, firing off their rifle

and yelling at the top of their lungs. The horsemen formed a guard of honour for Riel, and escorted him in triumph into the village. There the rest of the settlement, numbering several hundred men, women and children, were gathered to greet him.

The entry into Batoche was perhaps the greatest moment in Riel's life. All memories of the long years of wandering in loneliness and exile were forgotten. There was room for only one emotion in his heart—thanksgiving. Riel had never before seen the country of the Métis along the South Saskatchewan River, but that did not matter. For where his people were, there was his country too.

The exile had at last come home.

2. The Métis

Who were these people living along the banks of the South Saskatchewan River in the North-West Territories, who had called Louis Riel out of exile to lead them in their struggle against the Government of Canada? The word "Métis" means "mixed blood". Many of the early French fur-traders, the *coureurs de bois*, who adventured up the St. Lawrence into the wilderness, took Indian girls for their wives. Later, and still farther west, the employees of the North-West Fur-Trading Company, and to a lesser extent the men of the Hudson's Bay Company, also intermarried with the Indians. Thus was created a people of mixed blood, part white, part Indian. In some, the white strain was Anglo-Saxon, but those of French and Indian ancestry were more numerous and formed the most distinctive and closely knit group of "mixed bloods" on the plains. They are the true Métis.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century there were several thousand Métis living in the West. During the summer they roamed over hundreds of miles of open prairie; but they tended to concentrate their settlements along the Red River valley, in the territory extending from the site of the present city of Winnipeg south to the American border and beyond.

At that time the Nor'-Westers and the Hudson's Bay Company were bitter rivals in the fur trade. The Nor'-Westers, many of whom were French, were smart enough to cultivate the friendship of the Métis. They hired some of the men as *voyageurs* on their river-boats (the Métis were the finest rivermen in the West), they gave others seasonal employment around the trading-posts, and they bought furs from the Métis trappers at good prices. The employees of the Hudson's Bay Company were inclined to look down on the Métis as "half-breeds". But the Nor'-Westers treated them as equals and so won their loyal support.

In the year 1812 a Scottish nobleman, Lord Selkirk, who was a prominent shareholder in the Hudson's Bay Company, established a colony of settlers from Scotland along the Red River. The territory occupied by the settlers, called Assiniboia, lay in the heart of the Métis country. The Métis were alarmed, for they had come to look upon the land along the Red River as their own.

The Nor'-Westers, eager to strike the Hudson's Bay Company a crushing blow, were quick to encourage the unrest among the Métis. "If the colony makes good," they argued, "more white settlers will come out from Canada and Europe. Hundreds—thousands. They'll overrun the whole of the West—take away the land that is really yours."

The Métis believed what the Nor'-Westers told them. Their fears intensified, their anger burned to a white heat. A strong force of well-armed Métis horsemen struck sud-

denly at the new colony, and in what is known as the Seven Oaks Massacre they shot down Governor Robert Semple of the Hudson's Bay Company and twenty-one of his men. The settlers fled from their farms in terror, and the Métis pillaged and burned their homes. When the raid was over, the destruction of the colony seemed complete.

So the Métis met the challenge of the white man. For the first time in their history they had resorted to violence in order to preserve a way of life they loved. They were to do so twice more—in 1869 and 1885.

But Lord Selkirk refused to give up his dream. Doggedly he re-established the colony. After a while the Métis began to forget their fears. The settlers increased in numbers very slowly, the boundaries of the white settlement were not extended, and it seemed clear at last that there would be enough land for both whites and Métis for many years to come. In 1821 the Nor'-Westers united with the Hudson's Bay Company, and thereafter the Métis were free

of the influence of unscrupulous traders who in times past had urged them to violence. Peace, after years of struggle and unrest, came at last to the Red River country.

The period from 1821 to 1869 is the Golden Age of the Métis nation. During that time the Métis lived in peace and great happiness. The rule of the Hudson's Bay Company was in the main kindly and just, and the Métis didn't quarrel very often with either the Company or the white settlers. Their way of life was now a compromise between that of the white man and the Indian. They owned farms along the Red River valley laid out in the old French seigneurial way--long narrow strips fronting the river. Each man held water and hay rights, he grew small crops of grain and raised a few head of cattle. But the Métis were farmers leading settled lives only during the spring and fall—the times of seeding and harvest. In the winter they fished and trapped, and in the summer they hunted the buffalo.

The buffalo hunt played an essential part in the Métis way of life. The buffalo supplied the Métis with fresh and dried meat, pemmican, and hides for clothing and rugs. What meat and hides they didn't need for their own immediate use they traded for groceries and tobacco. Food, clothing, and the little luxuries that added much to the zest of living—all of these things came from the same source, the great beasts that roamed the plains in countless thousands until the closing years of the nineteenth century.

But the buffalo hunt was much more than a source of essential supplies, it was also a most thrilling adventure

which satisfied the craving of the restless hot-blooded Métis for action and excitement. Every Métis youngster longed for the day when he would be old enough to take part in the hunt, to ride his sure-footed pony into the tumult and menace of the thundering herd, to shoot down with his muzzle-loader—or even primitive bow and arrow—the great hulking brutes who in death meant abundant life for the people of the plains.

The great annual hunt started early in June. Armed men on horseback, women and children on foot or riding in cumbersome Red River carts, moved out of the settlements along the river to the appointed rendezvous. Sometimes as many as two thousand Métis, with hundreds of carts for bringing home the spoils of the chase, assembled at the meeting-place.

The organization of the hunt usually took several days. First, the men assembled in open meeting and elected a governor and several captains, whose orders they agreed to obey without question. The Métis were passionate lovers of independence and each man liked to go his own way,

but they all accepted the necessity of a strictly disciplined semi-military organization when a winter's food supply was at stake.

Next, a carefully chosen band of scouts was sent out far ahead of the main body to look for buffalo; and lastly, the women and children piled tents and equipment into the Red River carts and struck out across the prairie in the direction which the scouts, now far out of sight, had taken.

Sometimes the scouts were lucky and spotted a herd of buffalo almost at once. At other times they might have to search for a week or more before sending word back to the straggling procession behind them that a herd was in sight. But until the coming of the buffalo killers later in the century—men who slaughtered the buffalo for their hides alone—there were few records of complete failure. Sooner or later a herd was spotted, and the hunt was on.

The governor of the hunt signalled the beginning of the "killing" run with a wave of the arm and a shrill "Ho-ho!" The Métis horseman approached the herd at a slow trot; then, when the herd stampeded, at a reckless gallop. They

swept back and forth through the confused turmoil of terrified animals, choking in dust but shooting with deadly accuracy, re-charging their muzzle-loading guns at astonishing speed, killing again and again; until horses and men were exhausted, and the remnants of the herd scattered beyond reach of gun-shot.

A dangerous game, the buffalo hunt. Sometimes there was mourning in the camp for a son or husband hurled by a stumbling horse beneath the hooves of the buffalo. But considering the risks involved, the casualties over the years were few. The Métis were superb horsemen, the ponies they rode sure-footed as mountain goats.

Meanwhile the women, hearing the crackle of gun-shot and the yells of the hunters that marked the beginning of the killing run, whipped up their horses and rattled wildly across the prairie in the Red River carts to the scene of the slaughter. On the spot they helped the men to butcher and skin the dead buffalo and pile the carcasses into the carts. Back in camp they set to work at once to tan the hides, dry meat in long strips, and make pemmican (a mixture of meat, melted fat, and sometimes wild berries, sewn up in bags) for winter use.

Summer was the Métis' favourite season, for it was the time of the hunt. But even during the long cold winters in the settlements they led a happy carefree life. A wedding or a christening was always an excuse for a night-long —sometimes week-long—celebration. The men in brightly-sashed shirts, blue corduroy trousers and beaded moccasins, the shy pretty girls in gaily coloured wide-skirted calico

dresses, danced the night through with hardly a pause for rest. The elders of the community sat on benches along the walls, gossiped endlessly, and sometimes took a turn on the floor to show the youngsters how a complicated set *should* be danced. And from time to time the entire company joined in the rousing choruses, most of them French in origin, which were dear to the Métis heart. The music for the dances was always supplied by a fiddler who played with expert skill. After the Battle of Batoche in 1885, the Canadian troops were astonished to find a fiddle, obviously much used, hanging on the wall of nearly every Métis home they entered.

It was a good life that the Métis lived during those golden years between 1821 and 1869. They put down roots of a sort in their settlements along the Red River and elsewhere. The Church provided a centre of community life, for the Métis were devout Roman Catholics. But they did not live in the settlements all the year round; they were free to roam very much as they pleased over the great plains—hunting, trapping, fishing. Thus both sides of their nature, white and Indian, found full expression, and thoughts of tomorrow troubled them not at all.

Not until the year 1869, when they became aware of a threat to the carefree way of life they had led for nearly half a century.

3. *Man of Destiny*

IN 1869 the Dominion of Canada was made up of the four provinces—Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario—which had entered into confederation in 1867. Beyond the western boundary of Ontario lay the North-West Territories, a vast hinterland reaching all the way to British Columbia, and ruled over by the Hudson's Bay Company. In the opinion of most Canadians the North-West Territories was valuable only for its furs.

But there were men and women living in the eastern provinces in whom the pioneering blood ran strong. They were anxious to seek their fortunes in the land where the Selkirk settlers had managed to put down roots. And some far-seeing statesmen were disturbed by the rapid expansion of the United States westward. They were afraid that the aggressive American pioneers, many of whom were unfriendly to Great Britain, might lap up over the border and claim for the United States the land in which Canada and Great Britain had so far shown little interest. For these reasons the Canadian Government decided, in 1869, to take over the vast domain of the North-West Territories, including Assiniboia, from the Hudson's Bay Company and administer it through government-appointed officials as a Crown Colony.

The Métis were at once alarmed. They were afraid that as soon as the transfer of the territory took place white settlers would come swarming west. White settlers meant farms laid out in squares instead of long strips fronting the river; they meant interference with the fur trade and the buffalo hunt; they meant the end of the way of life that the Métis had led since the beginning of their existence.

For the Métis were still a roving people. They had adopted farming only half-heartedly. The Indian strain was strong in them, and their real life they lived in the summer out on the open plains where there was room for a man to move and breathe. When they heard of the proposed handing-over of Assiniboia by the Hudson's Bay Company to the Dominion of Canada they at once took steps to safeguard the way of life they loved.

But how could they explain their doubts and fears to the Canadian Government? How could they make plain to the Government that they considered themselves a nation, with national rights to the territory they occupied? Few of the Métis could read or write, fewer still could speak English. Who among them could deal as man-to-man with the smooth-tongued politicians from the East who spoke one thing and so often meant another?

It was now, in the time of crisis, that Louis Riel emerged as leader of the Métis.

Riel was born in St. Boniface in 1844. As a child he hunted and fished and played games with youngsters his own age, but there was always something odd about him. He liked often to be alone, spending long hours poring

over books that the parish priest lent him. Archbishop Taché of St. Boniface was quick to see that Louis was a lad of unusual intelligence, and arranged that he be sent East to school in Montreal.

For ten long years Louis worked hard at his studies, preparing for the priesthood. But his heart remained in the West; and when his widowed mother wrote saying that she needed him at home he gladly gave up his studies and hurried back to the land he loved, and to the people for whom he would some day die.

It is easy to understand why the Métis soon hailed Louis Riel as their leader and followed him with a blind loyalty. Because they had little formal education themselves they had a great respect for the well-educated man; and Riel spoke and wrote both English and French and knew more Latin than most of the priests. He was a great orator, and oratory always stirred the Métis' Indian blood. He was also a man of splendid heritage, whose father had several times taken the lead in upholding the rights of the Métis against the Hudson's Bay Company. Yes, the Métis agreed, Louis Riel, in 1869 just twenty-five years of age, was the man to explain to the Canadian Government that while the Métis would not oppose with violence the taking over of Assiniboia as a Crown Colony of the Dominion, they would insist on preserving their rights as a free people.

For the Métis believed that their claim to the land they lived on and hunted over was just and legal. Except for the Indians, they were the first people to live in the country west of Ontario, and in that country they had developed

their own distinctive way of life, a way neither white nor Indian. They looked upon themselves as a nation, and they were determined to maintain their national rights.

It was Louis Riel who expressed most clearly this feeling of the Métis that they were a distinct and independent people formed by the uniting of two blood-streams—white and Indian.

"It is true," he said, "that our savage origin is humble, but it is fitting that we should honour our mothers as well as our fathers. Why should we concern ourselves about what mixture we possess of European or Indian blood? If we have ever so little of either gratitude or filial love, should we not be proud to say 'We are Métis!'"

Not white, not Indian, but Métis. And the passionate assertion of nationhood, *We are Métis!*, was for years the rallying cry of the wild free folk of the plains. Pride in their origin, faith in their destiny—these things Riel gave to his people.

The transfer of Assiniboia from the rule of the Hudson's Bay Company to Canada was badly bungled. The Canadian Government made little effort to assure the Métis that their rights would be respected. Indeed, long before arrangements for taking over the territory were completed, surveyors from Canada were busy in the Red River valley marking out for future settlement the land which the Métis had always regarded as their own.

But one day, when the surveyors were running a line across a field where a Métis settler claimed hay rights, a group of unarmed men appeared suddenly before them.

The leader of the group, a tall, curly-haired young man, placed his foot on the survey chain and said calmly, "You go no farther." The authority in his voice awed the surveyors. Quietly they packed up their equipment and went away. The young man was Louis Riel. The Métis were delighted when they heard what had happened, for they knew now that their leader was brave as well as wise.

The date set for the transfer of Assiniboia from Com-

pany to Canadian rule came and passed. The Company surrendered its control, but the Canadian Government failed to issue the long-awaited proclamation which would place Assiniboia under Dominion authority. This meant that Assiniboia was now a territory without either government or law. Whereupon Louis Riel formed what he called a "provisional" government, consisting of representatives of both white and Métis settlers, to look after the affairs of Assiniboia until the Dominion Government made up its mind what to do.

So far, Riel had acted with wisdom and restraint. But now, excited by the power which he held, he went too far. In order to make sure that his authority would be respected, he seized Fort Garry, the headquarters of the Hudson's Bay Company situated a short distance from the village of Winnipeg, and imprisoned in the Fort a number of white men who were trying to stir up trouble against his provisional government.

Riel acted rashly in seizing the Fort and imprisoning the men whom he regarded as his enemies. But it is probable that had he kept his head in a difficult situation he would today be remembered as a great Canadian, the father of the Province of Manitoba. For it was he who first suggested that the new territory be taken over as a province rather than a Crown Colony, and his suggestion was later acted upon by the Dominion Government.

But Riel did not keep his head. In a moment of madness he committed an act which overnight transformed him, in the eyes of many Canadians, from a capable and in-

telligent leader of his people into an inhuman monster.

A group of hot-headed Canadians living in Assiniboia made a sudden raid on Fort Garry to rescue the men whom the Métis were holding prisoner. The raid was a dismal failure, and the raiders quickly joined in prison the men they had come to release. Riel was enraged by what he thought was an attempt to overthrow the authority of his government. Determined to teach the plotters a lesson they wouldn't forget he sentenced two of them to death. One of the condemned men was the leader of the raid on Fort Garry, Major John Boulton. Boulton, an ex-officer of the Imperial Army, was one of the best-known white settlers in Assiniboia. The second victim of Riel's justice was a young man whom Riel had long regarded as an evil and blasphemous trouble-maker. His name was Thomas Scott.

At the last minute Riel granted Major Boulton a reprieve. But he refused to listen to the appeals from the English-speaking community to save Scott's life. At midday on March 4th, 1870, Thomas Scott, crying "This is cold-blooded murder!" died before a Métis firing-squad.

The execution of Thomas Scott ruined Riel's name forever in Eastern Canada. As leader of the Métis in time of crisis he had won for them important concessions from the Dominion Government and in so doing had perhaps prevented open rebellion among his people. By setting up a government in Assiniboia at a time when no government existed he had helped to keep the Americans from crossing the border into territory which for a brief time was outside the control of either the Hudson's Bay Company or the

Dominion of Canada. But Riel's services to the Métis and the Dominion were forgotten overnight; and the cry in Ontario was for vengeance against the man of blood, the impudent "half-breed" who had dared to kill a white man.

The Province of Manitoba was created by Royal Proclamation early in 1870. Soon afterwards a strong force of militia reached Winnipeg from the East, to preserve order in the new province. Riel feared the vengeance of the white man (there were many of Scott's friends and sympathizers among the militia) and fled to the United States. Later, when the hue and cry had died down a little, he returned to Manitoba. He was even elected to the House of Commons, but was not permitted to take his seat on the grounds that he was a criminal.

Riel went again to the United States where he was for many years a wanderer. But his confidence in his destiny was unshaken. Some day, he knew, his people would call him back. Some day the Métis, under his leadership, would reclaim their lost heritage.

4. Wagons West

The Métis of Red River tried hard to adapt themselves to the new order. But they hated the restrictions of the white man's civilization. They knew that if they were to survive in the Red River country they must settle down in a fixed place and cultivate the soil; they must give up the joyous excitement of the buffalo hunt and the freedom of a wandering life on the plains.

Two ways of life had come into conflict, and the Métis' choice was this: to become farmers, each confined to his own few acres of land like the white man; or to break away completely from the Red River country and journey far off into the North-West Territories, where a few Métis settlements had already sprung up, and there re-establish the old way of life.

Young Gabriel Dumont, Louis Riel's cousin, had visited the far western outposts along the Saskatchewan River in 1868. He had brought back word of vast rolling plains untouched by the white man's plough, of an abundance of fur-bearing animals, and of buffalo herds running almost from the spot where one stood to the horizon and beyond. His eyes glowed when he talked about the Saskatchewan River country.

"It's a land," he said, "where a man can find room to live in the old way."

Some of the Métis chose to remain in Red River, but many chose to go.

The migrants from Red River piled their carts high with household goods and struck out across the plains towards the promised land. The carts moved in slow noisy procession through the dust and heat. Mounted scouts rode far ahead to show the way and keep a sharp look-out for buffalo and hostile Indians. There was deep sadness in the hearts of many, because they were leaving a country they had come to look upon as their own. But there was excitement, too, and hope; for surely in the wild far-off land they were going to, where their only neighbours would be the Indians, they would be a people forever free.

So, perhaps, they dreamed. And the land they came to was good. The South Saskatchewan River flowed yellow and turgid between deep-channelled banks—a big river befitting a big country. The banks of the river were tree-embroidered with willow and poplar and birch, and groves of the delicate aspen which were said to be the favourite haunt of the buffalo. And beyond the river banks stretched the great prairie, not flat the way it was in the Red River country, but rolling, studded with groves of trees and lakes and sloughs that assured an ample supply of wood and game.

Soon there were Métis settlements scattered widely throughout the North-West Territories, as the vast region between Manitoba and the Rockies was then called. But the largest concentration of Métis was along the South Saskatchewan River between what are now the cities of Prince Albert and Saskatoon. The straggling settlement of St. Antoine de Padua, later called Batoche after the ferryman and chief trader of the district, was the centre of the South Saskatchewan community.

Here the Métis quickly re-established the life they had known of old. They laid out their farms in two-mile strips fronting the river, grew scanty crops of grain and vegetables, raised a few head of livestock, trapped during the winter, and in summer hunted the buffalo.

For a year or two things were almost the same as they had been in the old days. But the Métis soon realized that they were not going to be left for long in undisturbed possession of their new country. White settlers were mov-

ing into the North-West Territories in ever-increasing numbers, pressing closer and closer to the Métis settlements. The newly organized force of North-West Mounted Police was the visible symbol of the white man's authority and power. The Métis, unlike the Indians, never trusted the Mounties, perhaps because their red coats reminded them of the militia who had marched into Winnipeg in 1870, threatening vengeance on the Métis for the killing of Thomas Scott.

Then came disaster. Almost overnight the buffalo vanished from the prairie. The great herds were wiped out by the buffalo hunters (mostly white men) who, careless of the appalling waste of food, shot the great animals for their hides and left the carcasses on the prairie to rot. The last buffalo hunt in the North-West Territories was held in 1877. After that there were no more buffalo, and fear of starvation haunted both Métis and Indians.

But the Métis knew that somehow they must cling to their homes in the valley of the Saskatchewan. They could go no farther in their efforts to escape the white man's civilization. To the north lay dense forest, then the endless lifeless barren lands; south, an alien country that they could not enter; west, the great barrier of the Rockies—and the Métis were a people of the plains. Here in the middle of the last great open space in the West, along the deep gash cut by the mighty Saskatchewan, they would stay, for they had no choice.

But someone must speak for them to the Government of Canada, someone must plead their right to hold the

land they had settled upon, and to be represented by men of their own choice in the Dominion Parliament. The Métis had sent petitions to Ottawa explaining what they wanted, but the Government had paid no attention to their pleas. Surveyors from the East were already in the valley of the South Saskatchewan re-dividing the land into the hated squares that cut so many off the river. And further, the Government, in this time of near-starvation, was cutting down on grants of supplies to the Indians, apparently believing that the Indians could be starved into being industrious farmers.

Yes, the Métis agreed, someone must speak for them. Someone to whom the Government at Ottawa would listen. In the old Red River days there had been such a man among them. A man who had stood up to the Government and hurled the proud defiant cry "We are Métis!" across the plains for all the world to hear. Could he not be brought back to lead the Métis in this, their last and greatest fight to defend the way of life they loved?

In the spring of 1884 the Council of the Métis, meeting at Batoche, voted unanimously to send for Louis Riel, who was known to be teaching at an Indian Mission school in Montana. Gabriel Dumont, the "Prince of the Prairies", greatest of buffalo hunters and leader of the Saskatchewan Métis, was glad. Gabriel himself was no orator. But cousin Louis, he knew, could speak with a silver tongue to the Government of Canada.

And if the Government refused to listen, then Gabriel would speak too. With his Winchester. He was the

deadliest marksman in a nation of sharpshooters, but since the disappearance of the buffalo there hadn't been much to shoot at.

On July 1st, 1884, Louis Riel, who now called himself David, came home to his people.

5. The Gathering Storm

THE Métis cheered Riel wildly when he entered Batoche; and their greeting was a foretaste of greater triumphs to come. Not only the Métis, but the English half-breeds and many white settlers as well, at once hailed him as their leader. For all these people had grievances in common—above all, they complained that the Government would not give them clear titles to the land they had settled on—and they knew that the fiery passionate Riel could speak for them as could no other man.

Riel lost no time getting to work. He addressed large enthusiastic meetings at Batoche, Prince Albert and other settlements; he wrote out and sent petitions, at first moderate in tone, to the authorities at Ottawa, urging that the settlers along the Saskatchewan be given titles to their land, that the North-West Territories be made into a province and the people given proper representation in Parliament. But only unsatisfactory answers or none at all came from Ottawa; even though the Honourable Edgar Dewdney, recently appointed Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Territories, and several distinguished Mounted Police officers added their pleas to those of the Métis.

The Police officers had good reason to be alarmed. As

the autumn of 1884 passed and merged into winter the Métis and Indians grew more and more restless and defiant. Crops that year were poor, the buffalo had long since vanished, and the Canadian Government, in a foolish "economy" move, still further reduced the issue of rations to the Indians. Hunger stalked the Métis settlements and the Indian reserves. No wonder Superintendent Crozier, in charge of the Mounted Police detachment at Battleford, urged that, if the requests of the Métis and Indians were not going to be met, Police reinforcements should be sent at once to the danger-points in the North-West.

For Crozier knew—as nearly every white man in the Territories knew—that if the Métis were provoked to fight, the Indians would almost surely join them. The Indians had been restless and surly for a long time now. In times past, most of the tribes had made treaties with the Government. In return for grants of reserves and "treaty" money they had surrendered their land and their free wandering way of life. But now the Indians were protesting that they had been tricked. They said that the reserves were small and poor, that the white men had killed off the buffalo on which the livelihood of the Indians so largely depended, and given little or nothing in return.

From nearly all points in the North-West the news of the Indians was the same—unrest, agitation, sometimes open defiance of the law. In southern Alberta, down along the Bow River, cattle-raiders from the Blackfoot and Piegan reserves were making life miserable for the ranchers and Mounted Police. At Crooked Lakes, starving tribesmen

attacked and beat up the Government farm instructor, broke into the Government warehouse and helped themselves to the carefully hoarded supplies of flour and bacon. In the Eagle Hills south of Battleford, Chief Poundmaker's fiery young Cree warriors were talking openly of going on the war-path. Most sinister of all, Big Bear's band of Plains Crees, who had never accepted a treaty with the white men, were prowling hungrily about the little settlements of Frog Lake and Fort Pitt on the North Saskatchewan, spoiling for trouble. Sullen dangerous men, these warriors of Big Bear. Men who remembered the great days of freedom before the coming of the whites. Men who, their hearts filled with resentment and bitter regret, no longer listened to the wise words of their old chief, Big Bear, but looked forward with savage eagerness to the day when the white man would pay for his crimes in blood.

During the bitter winter of 1884-5 Riel's agents were often among the Indians, calling upon them to support Riel in his struggle against the Canadian Government. Of all the crimes charged to Riel, perhaps the most serious in the white man's eyes was that of trying to provoke an Indian uprising in support of the Métis. But the Métis regarded the Indians as their blood relations—people in most ways much nearer to them than the whites and with whom they shared common problems. Naturally, they turned to their blood brothers for help in time of trouble.

The demands which Riel was making upon the Canadian Government even as late as the spring of 1885 were still reasonable enough. But the Ottawa politicians distrusted

and feared Riel and therefore tried to ignore him. Riel was a proud hot-blooded man, who could not endure treatment which he regarded as an insult to the dignity of his position. As the winter dragged to a close he grew more and more violent, and talked openly of armed revolt.

The white settlers and the English half-breeds took fright. Open war was more than they had bargained for. Father André, the Roman Catholic priest in charge of the Batoche Mission, who had at first been delighted with Riel's moderate attitude, now tried to persuade him to leave the country. Riel refused. He said that he was going to set up, under the protection of an armed force of Métis, a "provisional" government, as he had done in Red River fifteen years before. Then the Canadian Government would be forced to recognize the existence of the Métis nation and to make terms with it.

But the situation in the North-West Territories in 1885 was not the same as it had been in the Red River in 1870, and there was no chance of Riel's repeating his earlier though short-lived triumph. In 1870 he had not challenged the authority of any legally established government; for no government of any kind existed in Red River in the period immediately following the surrender of the Hudson's Bay Company charter. But the North-West Territories were firmly under the rule of the Government of Canada. Therefore, in attempting to set up his own government, Riel was guilty of treason.

But once his mind was made up he moved swiftly. He demanded that Father André, in the name of the Roman

Catholic Church, approve the setting up of a provisional government of the Métis. Father André refused, and Riel publicly denounced him as a traitor.

The Métis were deeply religious and much attached to their priests. But Riel's power was now so great that he was able to defy the Church and still retain the support of his people. His magnificent oratory and his tremendous self-confidence convinced them that he was a prophet greater than the Church, that he was indeed God-sent and God-inspired.

The priests worked hard to re-establish the authority of the Church and save the Métis from the horrors of war. But suddenly word ran like a prairie fire through the settlements that a large force of Mounted Police was on its way north from Regina to reinforce the detachments already stationed at Prince Albert, Battleford and Fort Carlton. Here at last was the Canadian Government's answer to the reasonable requests of the Métis.

"In answer to our petitions the Government sends police," Riel cried. "The die has been cast for war!"

Gabriel Dumont was delighted. He didn't know much about petitions to the Government but he knew a lot about rifles. The Métis appointed him their military commander-in-chief and he went to work at once to assemble an army.

The Métis could not have chosen a better field leader. Gabriel Dumont was respected and loved by all the Métis, and many white people as well. The "Prince of the Prairies" was a simple-hearted, impulsive and generous

man, intensely loyal to his own people, and friendly towards all men until stirred to furious anger by the indifference of the Canadian Government to the legitimate claims of the Métis. That such a man as Gabriel Dumont was driven to take up arms is evidence, not of Dumont's rebellious nature, but the Canadian Government's tragic bungling in its dealings with the Métis.

The priests of the Batoche Mission made one more effort to save their people from disaster. They threatened them with excommunication (exclusion from all the sacraments of the Church) if they continued to obey Riel. But Riel again defied the priests. "Rome is fallen!" he shouted wildly, as he drove Father Moulin from the Church of St. Antoine in Batoche. He believed he was greater than the Church, greater than the State, for was he not God's own prophet?

God's prophet or not, Riel had become absolute ruler of the Métis. He set up his provisional government and chose the members of the council himself. He called upon Father Moulin to denounce the Pope and become the first priest of a new "Church of the North-West". And, since no priest would accept the office, he appointed himself chaplain to the Métis armed forces.

In the House of Commons in Ottawa, Sir John A. Macdonald, Prime Minister of Canada, admitted that there was a little trouble in the North-West. The Government had received reports of a few isolated Indian raids on settlers' homes and government agencies, and the setting up of an absurd local government by that half-mad rascal, Louis Riel. But there was no real cause of alarm. Such little disturbances were bound to occur at a time when the Indians and Métis were being compelled to adopt the ways of the white man.

"If you wait for a half-breed or an Indian to be contented," Sir John said, laughing, "you may wait for the millenium!"

He did not say that the Government had any long-term policy in mind for dealing with the Indian and Métis problem. No doubt he thought, as white men have always tended to think, that in time the primitive folk would be overwhelmed by the advance of civilization and either penned up on reserves or converted into industrious law-abiding farmers. So the problem, if you just let it alone, would cease to exist.

But, Sir John said with assurance, steps were being taken

to deal with the immediate situation. A commission had been appointed to look into the vexed question of surveys and land titles; the Police were being strongly reinforced at all possible trouble points; and as an extreme precautionary measure Major-General Frederick Middleton, Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian Militia, had been sent to Winnipeg to be on the spot in the most unlikely event of a revolt in the North-West.

The next day, March 27th, 1885, word flashed through the Dominion that the Métis had risen.

6. The First Shot

Superintendent Crozier, in charge of the Police detachment temporarily stationed at Fort Carlton, was a badly worried man. For a long time now the Indians had been insolent and hard to handle. The Police, Crozier felt, were not to blame. They were doing their best to help the Indians. They kept the whiskey-runners away from the reservations, they distributed food—sometimes from their own limited supplies when the inadequate Government handouts were exhausted—to the hungry tribesmen. But the Indians no longer looked upon the Police as protectors and friends, rather as agents carrying out the orders of a far-off Government that cared nothing about the sufferings of the red man. The Indians, Crozier knew, were hungry and dangerous.

The Métis were an even greater worry than the Indians. That wild man Louis Riel seemed to have taken leave of his senses, and the madness which gripped him was infecting all the settlements along both branches of the Saskatchewan. Already the Métis had plundered several trading-posts, held up government freight wagons and interfered with the mails. And as a crowning act of insolence Riel had sent a messenger to Crozier demanding the immediate surrender of Fort Carlton.

"In case of your non-acceptance," he wrote, "we intend to attack you when tomorrow, the Lord's day, is over; and to commence without delay a war of extermination upon all those who have shown themselves hostile to our rights."

Crozier didn't pay any attention to Riel's demand for the surrender of the Fort. All the same, he realized that if the Métis ever started shooting he and his men would be in a very tight spot.

For Fort Carlton was an indefensible position. It was not a military fort at all, but a Hudson's Bay Company trading-post taken over temporarily by the Police so that they could keep a watchful eye on the Métis at Batoche, only twenty miles to the east. The Fort was ringed on three sides by hills from which an attacking force could look down on the defenders and pick them off with long-range rifles.

But Crozier still didn't think that the Métis would really fight. They were, he thought, a simple childlike folk, first made sullen and hostile by a strong sense of injustices done to them, and now stirred to a kind of hysteria by the impassioned oratory of their mad leader. They weren't really killers. Crozier was sure of that.

All the same, he had done all he could to guard against a possible uprising. He had strengthened the defences of the Fort, and recruited eighty volunteer civilians from Prince Albert to reinforce his detachment of Police. And his appeal to the Government for aid had at last been answered. Commissioner Irvine was on his way from Regina with a strong force, riding towards Prince Albert.

In a day or two now, Irvine would swing down from Prince Albert to Carlton, and he and Crozier would put on a show of combined strength sufficient to convince the Métis that the Government meant business.

On the morning of March 26th, 1885, Crozier sent a party of teamsters, accompanied by a detachment of Mounted Police, to bring in supplies from the Government store at Duck Lake, a small settlement about halfway between Carlton and Batoche. Crozier didn't know that the Métis had plundered the store the previous night and made prisoners of the clerk and two of Crozier's scouts. Nor did he know that the Métis, enraged by word of the coming of Police reinforcements from the south, were mustering for war.

Halfway to Duck Lake the party of teamsters was stopped by a strong band of armed and mounted Métis led by Gabriel Dumont. The Métis demanded that the party turn back at once to Carlton. Angry words were exchanged, but the teamsters and Police knew that they were no match in open combat for the force of sharpshooters that confronted them. Swallowing their rage as best they might, they swung their teams round and straggled back towards Fort Carlton.

Left to himself Superintendent Crozier would probably —and wisely—have done nothing. He knew that to risk an open fight against the Métis was to invite disaster. For the Métis were the finest marksmen in the West, and fighting from behind cover on their own ground would be more than a match for any force that Crozier could send

against them. The thing for Crozier to do was to sit tight in the Fort and wait for the arrival of his superior officer, Commissioner Irvine, already on his way from Prince Albert to Carlton at the head of a strong force of well-trained Police.

But the civilian volunteers in the Fort—especially the teamsters whom the Métis had turned back from Duck Lake—were spoiling for a fight.

"If you don't take action right away," one of the teamsters is reported to have said to Crozier, "we'll tell the whole world you're a coward!"

Crozier was an Irishman. Under the circumstances no Irishman could refuse the challenge.

"Very well," he said heatedly. "If you want to go to Duck Lake I'll take you!"

The force which Crozier shortly afterwards led towards Duck Lake numbered nearly one hundred Mounted Police and volunteers. They were well-armed, and they brought with them an old seven-pounder cannon belonging to the Police. Some of the men rode on horseback, but most of them in sleighs. The snow still lay deep on the prairie, and the force advanced in a long-drawn-out line over a trail winding in and out among groves of trees. The trees, Crozier knew, would provide an excellent cover for ambush, but even now he could not believe that Riel really meant to fight. He was hopeful that the impressive size of the force under his command would over-awe the Métis.

The force reached a point about two miles from Duck Lake. Suddenly the scouts, riding in advance of the main

body, wheeled their horses and came galloping back at top speed. "There they are!" a scout shouted, pointing to the ridge of a low hill almost directly in front of the advancing force.

At once Crozier ordered the sleighs to be drawn up in a straight line across the trail. The men unslung their rifles and crouched down behind the hastily improvised barricade. Crozier carefully studied through his field-glasses the ground on which the Métis had chosen to make their stand. Ahead lay the low hill; to the right, about two hundred yards away, a seemingly deserted cabin; and on all sides, groves of naked trees in which nothing stirred. Snow had begun to drift down from a steel-grey sky. It was hard to see the enemy. Their clothes were the colour of the drab underbrush, and no sunlight reflected from their rifle barrels.

Two horsemen came riding down the hill towards the barricade of sleighs. The Métis were seeking a parley. Crozier, accompanied by an English half-breed named John Mackay who could speak to the Métis in their own language, rode forward to meet the horsemen.

One of the Métis representatives was a Cree Indian, the other was Isidore Dumont, Gabriel's brother. Crozier held out his hand to the Indian. At the same instant John Mackay, Crozier's interpreter, made a threatening gesture with his rifle. The frightened Indian snatched at the rifle, and Mackay fired a bullet through his body.

Crozier seems to have lost his head. He shouted "Fire away, boys," and he and Mackay spurred for shelter. From along the crest of the hill and behind the barricade of sleighs came the fierce rattle of gun-fire.

The North-West Rebellion had begun.

7. The Fight at Duck Lake

ISIDORE DUMONT and his Indian comrade lay dead in the snow, and the enraged Métis swarmed into action like angry bees. They spread down from both ends of the ridge and into the groves of trees in an encircling movement that threatened to surround Crozier's force. There weren't many Métis on the battlefield at first—not more than twenty-five or thirty—but the opening shots were heard at Duck Lake, and mounted reinforcements came up fast.

Crozier had made a bad mistake in ordering the sleighs drawn up in a straight line across the trail. His men were thus protected from a frontal attack only. But the seemingly deserted cabin to the right of the line was full of Métis snipers who now opened up with a deadly short-range fire against Crozier's exposed flank.

The Police and volunteers fought back with desperate courage against a cunningly concealed enemy who hardly ever gave them the chance of a clear shot. They swung the old seven-pounder cannon into action and tried to destroy the cabin, but after two shots the gunner rammed a ball into the barrel before the powder, and the cannon jammed. Around the cannon men fell down and died, their blood a darker red than the Policemen's tunics against the

grey-white snow. And all the time the Métis—now reinforced until they outnumbered Crozier's men by nearly two to one—crept steadily closer, clinging to the cover of trees and bushes and firing their rifles into the tangle of men and horses below.

A little group of Policemen tried to charge across the field, but the snow was too deep. The men floundered forward a few yards from the protection of the sleighs, their bright uniforms making perfect targets against the background of snow, and then drew back, carrying their wounded, leaving the dead where they fell. After that, all that Crozier's men could do was huddle behind the sleighs or bury themselves in the snow and fire back at an almost invisible enemy.

The Métis were growing bolder. For Louis Riel himself was among them now. He was unarmed—he had always hated firearms. Instead of a gun he carried a crucifix, and his voice was a high shrill chant urging his people to fight. The Police fired a volley at him, but he was beyond the range of their rifles.

"In the name of God the Father who created us," he cried, "let us reply to that!"

And the Métis, seeing their leader untouched by the bullets fired at him, were sure that he was indeed under the special protection of God, and attacked the white men with fresh enthusiasm and courage.

Crozier gave the order to retreat. Somehow the teamsters managed to hitch up their frightened plunging horses and swing the sleighs round in line on the trail. And not

a moment too soon, for by now the Métis had almost completely surrounded Crozier's force. Ten minutes more and defeat would have become a massacre.

Suddenly a horseman galloped from the Métis lines towards the retreating detachment, firing as he rode. The horseman was Gabriel Dumont, made reckless by excitement and bloodshed and seeking personal vengeance for the death of his brother Isidore. His horse slowed down and floundered in the deep snow, but Gabriel did not swerve until he was within sixty yards of the sleighs. As he swung his horse round a bullet struck him on the head and he tumbled into the snow, stunned, half-blinded with blood.

A comrade who saw him fall cried out in dismay and terror, "Gabriel is dead—Gabriel is dead!" But Gabriel scrambled to his knees and shouted back, "So long as I haven't lost my head I'm not dead!"

Somehow he got back to the Métis lines. Close beside him his cousin, Auguste Laframboise, fell shot through the body. Gabriel, still half-stunned by the blow on his head, dragged himself to the side of the dying man. He wanted

to make the sign of the cross and say a little prayer, a prayer which he had composed himself and which he recited morning and evening: *Lord, strengthen my courage, my faith and my honour, that I may profit all my life from the blessing I have received in Thy holy name.*

But he couldn't make the sign of the cross with his right arm, for the arm was paralysed. He made it with his left, and then tumbled across the body of his cousin.

But Gabriel Dumont was made of tough materials—all bone and gristle. In a little while he was back on his horse preparing to lead the Métis in a final onslaught on the enemy.

The Police and volunteers were retreating in complete disorder. They didn't even have a rear-guard covering their withdrawal. One swift fierce charge, Gabriel knew, and the detachment would be wiped out to the last man. But Louis Riel lifted high the crucifix and cried out, "In the name of God let them go! There has been too much bloodshed already."

Gabriel Dumont let the white men go.

In Duck Lake the people wildly cheered their triumphant warriors, and offered up prayers for the five Métis and Indians who had died in the battle. Louis Riel, still carrying the crucifix he had taken from the Church of St. Antoine in Batoche, reviewed his troops. He called for a special cheer for Gabriel Dumont, who sat unsteadily on his horse, his head swathed in bloody bandages.

"Let us thank God," Riel cried, "who has given us so valiant a leader!"

Riel appeared cheerful and confident in front of his people, but he was really sick at heart. All along he had thought that the Canadian Government would back down in the face of hostile demonstrations and come to terms with the Métis. Open war was the last thing he wanted because he knew that in the long run there could be only one outcome to a war between Métis and whites.

But somehow, things had got out of hand. Riel remembered vividly the red-coated militia marching into Winnipeg fifteen years before—it was a recollection that haunted him day and night. The troops would come again, for now that he had shed blood the whole of Canada would be roused against him. He clutched the crucifix tight to his breast and prayed that God would not desert him in his hour of need.

There was no cheering in Fort Carlton when the remnants of the shattered detachment straggled through the gates of the palisade. Police and volunteers alike were stunned by the catastrophe which in less than half an hour's fighting had snuffed out the lives of twelve men and

crippled as many more. The Prince Albert volunteers, realizing for the first time the gravity of the Métis menace, were desperate to return at once to Prince Albert to defend homes and families against possible attack. For there was no telling what might happen now that the Métis had tasted blood.

That evening Commissioner Irvine rode into Carlton at the head of a force of nearly one hundred Police. He and his men had made a remarkable march in bitterly cold weather from Regina to Prince Albert. Many of the men reached Prince Albert suffering severely from frost-bite and snow-blindness. But two days' rest had restored their strength and morale, and now they were fit and eager to fight. All except one recruit, recently out from England, who, when advised to get off his horse and walk, had flatly announced, "I prefer to freeze like a gentleman than run like a dog!" He remained behind in Prince Albert to have his toes amputated.

Irvine was bitterly angry with Crozier who, he felt, should have waited for the reinforcements he knew were on the way before moving against the Métis. But this was no time for quarrelling. The two veteran Police officers were agreed on one thing—that Fort Carlton could not be defended against a resolute attack and must be abandoned at once.

Next morning the Police and volunteers, carrying their wounded with them in sleighs, moved out of Carlton and took the long trail for Prince Albert, fifty miles away. They left behind them a blazing Fort—someone had accidentally

tossed a bundle of hay up against a hot stove. A column of smoke and flame rose in the still air high above the surrounding hills, a sinister symbol of the war that had come to the North-West.

Gabriel Dumont saw a fine chance to finish the work begun at Duck Lake. He told Louis Riel that the retreating Fort Carlton garrison must pass through a narrow gap in a dense grove of trees on their way to Prince Albert. There they could be ambushed and wiped out.

But Riel would not listen to Gabriel. One part of his mind told him that the Métis were now committed to open war; another part that a peaceful solution might somehow yet be found which would enable him to retain his position as leader of his people. Surely God would find a way out for his prophet?

"No, Gabriel," he said. "Let them go in peace."

"We could have killed the lot of them," Dumont said years afterwards. "But Riel wouldn't let us."

The retreating force, by grace of Louis Riel, reached Prince Albert safely and at once set to work to strengthen the defences of the town. The townsfolk were in a state of panic. On hearing of the Duck Lake disaster they had built a stockade round the Presbyterian Church and manse, and converted the manse into a hospital for the sick and infirm. Women and children crowded into nearby houses ready to run for the "fort" if an alarm were raised. Then Irvine and Crozier arrived with their force, and the townsfolk breathed easier.

Not for long. That evening the church bell boomed

out warning of an impending attack. Mothers snatched sleeping children from their beds and ran for the church. The men caught up their rifles and hurried to join the Police in manning the stockade. But the alarm proved false. A scout had got the wind up and reported seeing a large body of Indians advancing on the town. After a while it became clear that the Indians were a distant row of poplars waving in the evening breeze.

Meanwhile, through the whole of the North-West the word sped like wildfire that the Métis had met and routed a powerful force of well-armed Police and volunteers. The word reached the restless Blackfoot in Southern Alberta, the fierce resentful Stonies around Edmonton, and the hungry Crees in the Eagle Hills near Battleford. It reached Frog Lake, where Big Bear's band of disgruntled half-starved warriors, now actually under the leadership of the fierce war-chief, Wandering Spirit, were prowling about the white settlements, eager for blood.

The word reached Ottawa. And at last the Government of Canada took action.

8. *Marching on the Railroad*

Young Tom Moor raced through the crowded streets of downtown Toronto all the way home. "Dad—Mum!" he shouted as he burst into the kitchen, "there's a war on out West! Can I go?"

Tom's parents were upset. Tom was a good boy, doing well at his tinsmithing job. Some day he would own his own business. They were frightened at the thought of his leaving his safe comfortable home in Toronto to go thousands of miles away to the far West—to a country full, so they thought, of hostile half-breeds and howling painted red Indians. They were frightened, and proud too. Proud that their son, not yet eighteen years old, was so eager to answer his country's call to arms. The Moors were loyal Canadian citizens, and they knew that there was a great need now of young men to fight. They talked things over for a long time in the quietness of the little kitchen. At last Tom's father said, "Yes, Tom, you can go. And God bless and keep you."

Tom's face lit up. "Thanks, Dad," he said. "And don't worry. We'll lick them in a week!" Then he ran all the way back through the crowded streets to the headquarters of his militia unit, the Royal Grenadiers, and reported himself ready for active service.

A month later, huddled in a dim-lit tent on the battlefield of Fish Creek, Tom wrote to his father and mother: *Riel is strongly entrenched, but we will lick him in time. It was a sad sight to see our men burying the dead yesterday. I cannot tell you half in writing, but will tell you all when I get home.*

But Tom Moor did not get home. Two weeks after writing the letter he died on the high ground overlooking the settlement of Batoche, a Métis bullet through his brain.

There were thousands of young men in Eastern Canada like Tom Moor who, when word came of the revolt in the West, stormed the offices of their militia units, eager to fight Riel—young men loyal to their country, and anxious for adventure in far-off places. Eastern Canada was settled and safe and commonplace and life was sometimes dull, but the West was still a land of mystery and romance. There a man could fulfil his boyhood dreams. He could live dangerously and shoot Indians and come back home a hero.

It is not surprising that the militia units had no trouble making up the quotas of men for active service that the Government asked of them.

None the less, the Métis uprising found Canada almost completely unprepared to fight even a small-scale war. The last units of the British Imperial Army had been withdrawn from the country in 1867. Since that time military training, consisting of only a few days' drill a year, had been confined mainly to volunteer militia units in the larger cities of

the Dominion. Some members of the units were old soldiers of the Imperial Army who had settled in Canada. There were, too, a few units of "permanent" militia in the country which provided regular army training; and the recently established Royal Military College at Kingston was beginning to turn out competent officers. But most of the men who went West to fight Riel were bank-clerks and farmers and schoolteachers and ministers and tradesmen who knew nothing of the profession of war. Many of them had never fired a gun in their lives.

There were head-shakings among old soldiers who wondered what would happen to the young untrained militiamen if the Indians joined the Métis in revolt. They remembered the fate of the brilliant American general, George Custer, at the Battle of the Little Big Horn in Montana in 1876. There the great Indian fighter and his hard-bitten professional soldiers of the Seventh Cavalry had been trapped by the fierce Sioux under Chief Sitting Bull and killed to the last man. They remembered the amazing exploit of the gallant and chivalrous Chief Joseph, who in 1877 led his band of Nez Percé Indians on a retreat of over fifteen hundred miles to within thirty miles of the Canadian border, fighting off with his handful of starving warriors the finest veteran troops the United States Army could throw against him. If the tough professional soldiers of the American army had been able to defeat the Indians only through sheer force of overwhelming numbers, what would happen to the green lads of the Canadian militia, undisciplined and ill-equipped, when they met in battle the fierce warriors of the plains?

No such doubts troubled the minds of the militiamen as they swarmed aboard the C.P.R. coaches in Toronto, to the accompaniment of cheers from the dense crowd of relatives and friends that thronged the station. The coaches were warm and cosy; and when at last the train pulled out there was much laughter and joking among the eager amateur soldiers. Lots to eat, too, for most of the men had brought huge lunches with them. Old friendships were renewed, new ones struck up, and the militiamen talked endlessly of what would happen to Louis Riel once the Royal Grenadiers or the Queen's Own Rifles got at him.

But, as the dashing young men of the North-West Field Force soon found out, riding on the railway was one thing, marching on it was another. Along the north shore of Lake Superior, between Dog Lake and Nipigon, there was a stretch of nearly three hundred miles where construction was still going on. In places along the unfinished stretch, rails were hastily laid on the uneven road-bed and the troops carried over these places in swaying, bumping flat-cars. But there were long gaps, totalling nearly a hundred miles, over which the troops had to walk.

The journey west wasn't a picnic any longer, it was a large-sized nightmare. The snow was deep, the thermometer plunged to more than thirty degrees below zero, and the men weren't equipped to meet the ferocity of a midwinter climate. But with remarkable courage and good humour they battled their way through mountainous drifts, tramped across the ice of Lake Superior in the face of biting wind and the harsh glare of sunlight, pitched their tents in the great loneliness of pine forest and empty

sky each night, and sat huddled around the campfires until dawn. For four nights the men of the first units of the North-West Field Force went without sleep; they endured stoically the agonies of frost-bite and snow-blindness. The railway construction camps along the way were able to provide occasional hot meals, but the troops suffered nearly as much from hunger as they did from cold.

Transportation by flat-car was faster than walking, but a lot colder and rougher. The flat-cars hurtled over the unfinished road-bed, plunged down and up the sides of depressions that looked like huge canyons to the dismayed troops, and several times nearly left the rails. The swaying and jolting made some of the men seasick but didn't keep them warm. They crowded together in utter misery and wondered why they had ever left home.

At Nipigon the militiamen's troubles were over. There they again boarded comfortable coaches, and from that point on the journey west was smooth and uneventful.

The men even recovered from their sufferings sufficiently to make up a song poking fun at the Government, the C.P.R., and their own inadequate pay:

> The volunteers are all fine boys and full of lots of fun,
> But it's mighty little pay they get for carrying a gun;
> The Government have grown so lean and the C.P.R. so fat
> Our extra pay we will not get—
> You can bet your boots on that!

Considering the difficulties involved, the transporting of the North-West Field Force to Saskatchewan was a remarkable achievement on the part of the Government and the C.P.R. Just eleven days after the outbreak at Duck Lake the first militia units from the East were parading through the main street of the village of Qu'Appelle, a few miles east of Regina, the point which General Middleton had chosen as the jumping-off place for the march north.

Already the men had forgotten their past trials and

sufferings. The weather in Saskatchewan was cold, but the issue of blankets was now adequate, and food in good supply. And they were on the fringes of hostile territory. Soon they would be at grips with the enemy they had come so far to seek.

The militiamen were bubbling over with enthusiasm and confidence. The Métis and Indians, they knew, would be terrified at the sight of their bright-coloured uniforms; and the old muzzle-loaders of the enemy would be useless against the militiamen's Sniders and Enfields and Martini-Henrys. (Even though the issues of ammunition sometimes got mixed up, so that a soldier carrying a Snider might find himself with cartridges that fitted only a Martini-Henry, and vice versa.) A quick dash north to Batoche, perhaps a few side excursions chasing Indians, and the war would be over. And afterwards there would be the triumphal return home, to parents and sweethearts and friends and great roaring crowds and streamers and arches in the main streets and military bands playing like mad.

So the innocent young militiamen dreamed as they shuffled out of step through the village of Qu'Appelle or rolled up in their blankets at night under the vast star-studded western sky. And two hundred miles to the north that natural military genius, Gabriel Dumont, drilled his Métis cavalry in the hit-and-run tactics of guerilla warfare and planned the destruction of the fresh-faced lads from the East who wore the Queen's uniform and didn't know one end of a rifle from the other.

9. *The Troops Move North*

Major-General Frederick Middleton, Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian Militia, a burly red-faced officer with a huge white walrus moustache, was an old professional soldier and a very brave man. He had fought with the Imperial Army in India during the terrible Indian Mutiny of 1857, and his valour in the field had earned him a recommendation for the Victoria Cross. In 1884 he was appointed to command the Canadian Militia. He had looked forward to living out his last years of service to the Empire in the peace and quiet of a settled, law-abiding country. Now it was his bad luck, when past sixty, to be compelled to take the field again. Middleton couldn't help feeling that fate had played a dirty trick on him.

And what an army he commanded! Middleton was shaken right down to the soles of his cavalry boots when he inspected the first militia unit to reach Qu'Appelle—the Winnipeg 90th Rifles. The men of the 90th were, he knew, pretty representative samples of the troops with whom he was supposed to put down the revolt in the West. They couldn't march, they couldn't shoot, and they had never been under fire in their lives.

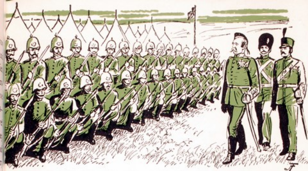
Given just one veteran British regiment of the line, and

Middleton wouldn't have worried at all. You could throw a regiment of professional soldiers against the enemy, and so long as you won nobody cared too much about casualties. To kill and be killed—that was the business of the professional soldier. The Canadian militiamen were brave enough, no doubt, but they weren't professional soldiers—not by a long shot. Most of them were youngsters still wet behind the ears. No telling what might happen when they came under heavy fire for the first time. And if many of them were killed in battle there would be a furious outcry from all over Canada against their commander.

Middleton was right in feeling that he was in a tough spot. It was his job to put down the revolt at once. He had to hit the enemy fast and hard or the whole of the West would be aflame. At the same time he couldn't afford to take any chances that would leave him open to the charge of unnecessarily risking the lives of his soldiers. All a man could do was to drill the green troops hard for a couple of days before starting north, and hope that the breaks would be on his side.

The old general worked with astonishing energy both at his headquarters in Qu'Appelle and in the field. He established a training camp at Fort Qu'Appelle, an old Hudson's Bay post twenty miles north of the village. There the militia boys learned to hang on to a kicking army rifle —even if they couldn't hit anything with it—and to obey, with some semblance of agreement among themselves, the most elementary orders of drill.

The plan of campaign which Middleton drew up was



simple and generally sound. He himself would lead the main column of the North-West Field Force almost straight north in a direct line to Batoche, the centre of the revolt. He proposed to start at once, taking with him the Winnipeg 90th Rifles, a few units of the permanent militia and a convoy of transport wagons driven by local farmers. Other units, as they arrived at Qu'Appelle, would hurry north to join the main body of troops. A second column under the command of Colonel Otter, an officer of the permanent militia, would move up from Swift Current, one hundred and fifty miles farther west, in a line roughly paralleling that of Middleton's march. The two columns would then close in on Batoche from opposite sides of the South Saskatchewan River.

Middleton also planned to use a naval unit against the Métis. He ordered an old Hudson's Bay paddle steamer, the *Northcote*, to leave Medicine Hat as soon as the ice went out, and move down-river, carrying troops and sup-

plies to a junction with the land forces somewhere near Batoche.

A third column, made up of Mounted Police, cowboys, and a few units of militia, was being hurriedly organized at Calgary under the command of Major-General Tom Strange. Strange, like Middleton, was an old Indian Army man. After his retirement from the army he had taken up ranching near Calgary. His force was organized to maintain law and order in Alberta, and if necessary march north to subdue Big Bear's restless Crees.

On April 6th, just eleven days after the fight at Duck Lake, General Middleton started north from Fort Qu'-Appelle at the head of a column of nearly four hundred men. His fighting force was made up of units of the Winnipeg Rifles and the permanent militia, and a detachment of mounted volunteer scouts under the command of Captain John French, an ex-officer of the Irish Militia.

Most of French's scouts were Old-Country men who had settled in the Qu'Appelle Valley district. The favouritism which Middleton showed towards these "men of good birth" as he called them, infuriated the officers of the Canadian militia. Middleton was in some ways an able leader, but never during the campaign did he win the confidence of most of the men who served under him. He was a commander of the old school who believed in rigid discipline, spit and polish, and the importance of "good blood" in officers. He never troubled to conceal his contempt for the untrained "colonial" soldiers under his command. Most of them returned it with interest.

At first the weather was windy and bitterly cold. Middleton himself shivered all through one dreary sleepless night, when the temperature dropped to twenty below zero, under a great pile of blankets and his own buffalo coat, but the tough old warrior didn't even catch a cold. That morning the troops had to chop the tent-pegs out of the ground with axes.

And there were things to worry about besides the weather. During the march north Middleton kept in close touch by messenger and telegraph with most of the key points in the West, and the news from many of these points was bad.

At least two of the Indian chiefs had found themselves unable to control their restless braves. The Eagle Hills Crees, stirred to a frenzy by news of the Métis victory at Duck Lake, defied the authority of Poundmaker and swooped down on the important town of Battleford, formerly the capital of the North-West Territories. A group of nearby Assiniboines also went on the war-path. They murdered two white men, plundered several settlers' homes, then hurried to join the Crees in their attack on Battleford.

Fortunately, the citizens of Battleford had warning of the attack. Hurriedly they fled from their homes and sought shelter in the Police fort, a stockade on a hill-top overlooking the town. From the stockade they looked on in helpless rage while the Indians plundered their stores and homes. One woman cried bitterly when she saw her dearest possession, a piano that had been freighted across

the prairie by ox-cart, smashed to pieces before her eyes. Almost equally distressing to many of the women shut up within the stockade was the spectacle of their Sunday-best silk dresses being modelled by proudly strutting Indian squaws!

But nothing could be done to stop the plundering. Inside the stockade there were only forty-three Policemen and a small force of poorly armed civilians to protect the lives of more than three hundred women and children.

What had happened at Battleford was bad enough, but Middleton was soon to hear of something far worse. On the day before Good Friday, Big Bear's warriors at Frog Lake at last struck at the hated white man. Roused to blind fury by the urgings of their fierce war chief, Wandering Spirit, they herded the white men and women of the little settlement out of the Roman Catholic Church where they had been at mass; and in response to Wandering Spirit's shrill cry of "Kill the whites—kill the whites!" they had shot down nine unarmed men. Among the dead were the Indian agent, Tom Quinn, part Indian himself and long the devoted friend of the Crees, and two priests of the local Mission. Only one white man, William Cameron, the Hudson's Bay factor, and two women escaped death, and they were prisoners in the hands of the Indians.

Their blood-lust whetted, Big Bear's men now struck at the Fort Pitt Police post on the North Saskatchewan, thirty miles from Frog Lake. The Fort was held by twenty-five Mounted Police under the command of Inspector

Francis Dickens, son of the great novelist. Besides the Police there were thirty white civilians, mostly women and children, crowded inside the Fort.

Fort Pitt, like Carlton, was an old Hudson's Bay post, built close to the river and overlooked on three sides by hills. Inspector Dickens, fearing for the lives of the civilians in the event of an all-out Indian attack, gave up the Fort without a fight. The civilians, under promises of

safety from Big Bear, surrendered to the Indians. The Police slipped out of the Fort in darkness and storm, and boarded an old scow on the Saskatchewan River, seeking to escape down-river to Battleford, ninety miles away.

The river had just broken up, the wind was blowing a gale, and the clumsy old scow was battered incessantly by huge blocks of ice. But six days after leaving Fort Pitt the little detachment of half-frozen, starving Policemen reached Battleford. The town was already under siege, but the men had no difficulty getting into the stockade, where they were given a tumultuous welcome and a hot supper by their beleaguered comrades.

Yes, the news was bad from all over. Not that Middleton believed everything he heard. He was convinced that most of the rumours flying about were nothing but wind. "Nor'-westers" he called them, with a snort of contempt. He was sure that most of the stories about the plight of Battleford were "nor'-westers". Superintendent Morris, in command of the Battleford Police detachment, had lost his nerve—that was all. If the Police were worth their salt they'd have routed the Indians long ago.

All the same, Middleton knew he couldn't ignore Morris's call for help. Reluctantly he changed his original plans and ordered Colonel Otter, in command of the second column, to march from Swift Current to Battleford instead of Batoche. And he gave General Strange permission to move north at once from Calgary to Edmonton and then swing east along the valley of the North Saskatchewan in pursuit of Big Bear.

The weather turned suddenly mild, and now Middleton's

men floundered through mud and water and waded ice-cold spring freshets that sometimes ran waist-high. But they dried themselves out at night around blazing camp-fires, restored their strength and spirits with vast quantities of corned beef and hard-tack and tea, and each night slept soundly beneath the great vault of darkened sky, undisturbed by the howling of coyotes far out on the plains.

Eleven days after leaving Fort Qu'Appelle the men of the Force pitched their tents near Clarke's Crossing, an important ferry-point on the South Saskatchewan less than forty miles from Batoche. By now the original column had been strongly reinforced by other militia units from the East which had come up fast from Qu'Appelle, and by a force of mounted scouts from the Shell River country of Manitoba.

Major John Boulton, the commander of the detachment of scouts, had a very special reason for taking the field against the Métis. He was the man who in 1870 had led the raid on Fort Garry to release the prisoners held there by Riel. He had been captured and condemned to death for treason against Riel's government. At the last minute Riel spared Boulton's life; but the fiery officer had not forgotten the insults and agonies he endured. After fifteen years he still thirsted for vengeance; and he instilled a good deal of his own aggressive spirit into the hard-riding men of his command. Boulton's Scouts turned out to be the most effective unit of the North-West Field Force. They served with notable dash and courage throughout the entire campaign against Riel.

Boulton's and French's Scouts were the only mounted

units that Middleton made much use of. He distrusted cavalry as an effective weapon of war, preferring to put his trust in the solid ranks of infantry. For this reason he tied up almost every available mounted unit in the West. Veteran detachments of the North-West Mounted Police were assigned to peaceful home-guard duties at points like Prince Albert and Regina. Middleton thus deprived himself of the services of the one group of men who, by reason of their training and knowledge of the country, could have fought the Métis on equal terms.

While Middleton waited at Clarke's Crossing, more units of militia arrived to swell the strength of his force to nearly eight hundred men. He decided, since he didn't know the whereabouts of the Métis forces, to advance towards Batoche along both sides of the river, and accordingly sent half his force over to the opposite bank. Since the only means of water transport was an old scow, the operation took nearly a full day. Middleton arranged that communication between the two forces should be maintained by means of an elaborate code of bugle notes. The system of communication worked well in practice, and Middleton was delighted with it.

On April 23, less than a month after the outbreak at Duck Lake, General Middleton, riding his great black charger, Sam, inspected his troops and gave the order for the advance on Batoche.

10. Gabriel Dumont Sets a Trap

At Batoche Gabriel Dumont fretted impatiently while the troops of the North-West Field Force advanced steadily from Qu'Appelle towards the Métis stronghold. From the beginning Dumont had planned a campaign of guerilla warfare. Ever since the fight at Duck Lake he had been drilling his cavalry in fast-moving manoeuvres designed to inflict heavy casualties on the enemy at small loss. It was a tough job to train the undisciplined young Métis to do what they were told. Now that the days of the buffalo hunt were over they weren't accustomed to taking orders from anyone. But they respected Gabriel, still the Prince of the Prairies, and tried hard to please him.

Dumont worried about equipment too. The Métis cavalry were well mounted but poorly armed. Only a few of the men owned Winchesters. The rest carried old muzzle-loaders. You could shoot straight enough with a muzzle-loader but you couldn't re-charge it quickly enough to compete on equal terms with a man armed with a Snider or a Martini-Henry. And ammunition was in short supply.

All the same, Dumont was sure he could hold up the advance of the Field Force if only Riel would give him a free hand. Hit-and-run attacks on the column in the dead

of night, snipers posted on the flanks of the column to keep up a harassing long-range fire, sorties to cut off stragglers and supply wagons, raids as far south as Qu'Appelle to tear up the tracks of the C.P.R.—why, there wasn't anything you couldn't do with a well-mounted outfit like the Métis cavalry behind you. Particularly since Middleton had shut up the Mounties in the settlements and was apparently determined to do all his fighting with slow-moving infantry units. Gabriel was sure that after a week or so of sleepless nights and fear-haunted days the green militiamen would develop a bad case of jitters.

"I can make them so edgy," he told Riel, "that in a few nights they'll be at each other's throats."

But Riel wouldn't listen to his military chief. He wanted no more fighting. He didn't know how to get out of the mess he was in but he was sure that fighting wasn't the way. None the less, he wanted to show the world that the Métis and Indians were a brotherhood determined to stand up for their rights. So while he was restraining Dumont he was at the same time sending his agents far and wide to stir up the Indians, with tragic results at Battleford and Frog Lake.

Riel's leadership in this time of crisis was wavering and inconsistent, but never for a moment did he lose his hold over his people. The Métis followed him blindly, believing, as he did himself, in his divine inspiration. At a time when the tramp of armies marching on Batoche could be heard for many miles across the prairies, the Council of the Métis were not concerning themselves with

problems of war. They were issuing a proclamation declaring that Louis Riel was indeed a prophet, they were planning the setting up of the new "Church of the North-West" with Riel as its head, and they were re-naming the days of the week in terms suitable to the new religion.

The troop column reached Clarke's Crossing. Dumont knew that if the Métis were to strike at all it must be at once. For the first time in his life he challenged the judgement of Louis Riel. He pointed out that the Métis, and such Indian allies as they could muster, could not possibly defend for long a fixed position like Batoche against cannon fire. If they were to accomplish anything at all they must fight on ground of their own choice. And at once.

"I'm going out to meet the soldiers," Gabriel said.

Riel shook his head. "We must put our faith in God," he said.

Gabriel preferred Winchesters. He repeated his arguments vehemently, over and over again. In the end, Riel broke down.

"All right, Gabriel," he said, half distracted. "Do as you wish."

Dumont moved fast, for he had learned from his scouts that Middleton was now advancing from Clarke's Crossing towards Batoche. He gathered together his impatient tumultuous cavalrymen, numbering about two hundred, along with a few Indian braves who had joined the Métis in the hope of excitement and plunder, and rode south at top speed. Louis Riel accompanied the troops, not as a

fellow-soldier but as their chaplain. At every rest stop he led the men in long impassioned prayers and urged them to say their beads.

But word reached the Métis that the Mounted Police had sent out a patrol from Prince Albert towards Batoche. Riel, fearing an attack on the unprotected settlement, hurried back to Batoche taking with him fifty men. Dumont was thus left with a force of only one hundred and fifty men to stem the onset of the militia. But he wasn't sorry to see Riel go, for now he had a completely free hand.

At a place called Fish Creek, a few miles north of Clarke's Crossing, Dumont prepared to make a stand. Fish Creek runs into the Saskatchewan River from the east, through a narrow canyon-like ravine. The bed of the

ravine is covered with dense scrubby bush, and trees and shrubs grow thickly up the sides.

The main body of Métis took shelter at the bottom of the ravine. The riflemen skilfully concealed themselves in old deeply-grooved buffalo trails that wound along the creek bed. Smaller bands of snipers were told off by Dumont to hide themselves in groves and ravines south and east of the creek.

Thus, if all went according to plan, Middleton's men would walk right into a trap—"Like an old-time buffalo pound," Dumont explained. In front of them they would find Fish Creek ravine filled with Métis riflemen, on the left flank the mighty barrier of the Saskatchewan River, and on the right the pick of the Métis snipers.

It was a masterly battle plan which Dumont had devised.

But it was upset by lack of discipline among his troops. Some of the high-spirited youths of the Métis cavalry ignored Dumont's orders to remain under cover. They rode out of the ravine and had fun chasing stray cattle along the trail leading from Fish Creek to Clarke's Crossing. They even built fires to roast the flesh of an animal they slaughtered.

Fortunately for the Field Force, Boulton's Scouts, who led the advance, were on the alert. On the morning of April 24th they were out at daybreak. Riding towards Fish Creek they came upon the smouldering ashes of several fires, and signs which indicated that a considerable body of horsemen had recently been in the vicinity.

So it was that when, in the grey dawn, the picked Métis snipers under personal command of Gabriel Dumont rode out of Fish Creek ravine to take up their positions on the flank of the advancing force, Boulton's Scouts beat them to the draw. The Métis rode for their lives. Dumont, shouting hoarsely, rallied the dismayed sharpshooters, and they made a stand in a poplar grove long enough to enable Dumont to get back to the ravine and organize the men there for battle. Some of the Métis had already taken flight; but the majority, encouraged by Dumont's resolute appearance and fierce fighting words, dug in and waited for the troops to appear on the skyline above the rim of the ravine.

Behind Boulton's Scouts the militiamen came swiftly on. This was the great hour they had dreamed about. At last they were at grips with the enemy.

11. The Battle of Fish Creek

Major Boulton himself led the charge of the Scouts that routed Dumont and his sharpshooters. The Scouts rode recklessly in pursuit of the fleeing Métis, firing on the dead run. Then rifles began to chatter from the edge of the ravine in which the main body of Métis lay hidden, and Boulton realized that further pursuit might mean disaster.

"Halt—dismount!" he shouted. "Spread out and lie down!"

The Scouts tumbled from their horses and crouched low in the tall prairie grass. "Fire away, boys," Boulton ordered. "Never mind if you can't see anything—keep on firing."

The Scouts willingly obeyed. They found comfort in the sound of their own rifle-fire, and in the thought that the hail of lead they sent flying over the edge of the ravine would keep the Métis pinned down along the creek-bed.

But the rebel riflemen were everywhere. In clumps of bushes along the rim of the ravine, in hollows away out on the prairie that you didn't even know were there till you saw puffs of smoke springing up from the apparently level plain; and the men in the ravine ahead kept popping up like jack-in-the-boxes, taking snap shots and ducking

down again before you could catch them in the sights of your rifle. The Scouts were soon in desperate straits. Two officers and several men were hit by the deadly Métis sniping, and every minute the fire from the enemy grew hotter until at last the Scouts no longer dared reply to it. They could only lie flat in the long grass and listen to the hum of bullets past their ears.

But the Scouts were good stuff. They clung to their advanced position and occupied the full attention of the Métis long enough to enable Middleton to bring up the militia.

The militiamen, nearly all of the Winnipeg 90th Rifles, straggled across the prairie towards the creek in a long wavering line. General Middleton, mounted on Sam, his favourite charger throughout the campaign, rode up and down the line shouting words of encouragement to the men who were under fire for the first time in their lives. A bullet fired by Gabriel Dumont ripped through the General's tall fur cap, but the redoubtable old soldier was unperturbed. He'd been under hotter fire in the Indian Mutiny.

"Men of the 90th," he roared, "don't bend your heads! If I'd been bending my head I'd have had my brains knocked out!"

His words may not have made much sense, but they sounded fine. Undoubtedly Middleton set a magnificent example of coolness under fire that won the admiration of the militiamen, and helped to soothe their badly-shaken nerves. Somehow you couldn't show fear in front of the

old boy who rode his charger as if he were on parade and didn't even flinch when a bullet went through his hat.

In less than half an hour after the opening exchange of shots, the battle-line extended along the edge of the ravine for nearly a mile. Time after time the militiamen drove forward, trying to get a foothold on the edge of the ravine so that they could fire down on the Métis in the creek-bed. But the moment they appeared on the skyline they presented perfect targets to the hidden Métis riflemen. They dropped where they stood, or else fled back into the shelter of shrubbery and long grass. The Métis muzzle-loaders were terrible weapons at close range. If they didn't kill outright they inflicted great ragged wounds.

And now a cheer went up from the militia, for the battery of artillery—two guns—had thundered into action. The cheering did not last long, for the guns proved almost useless. They were too close to the ravine to drop shells into it, and every attempt to advance them to the very edge and fire directly down on the enemy was met by a fierce hail of bullets from the defenders below. The Métis, who feared and hated the big guns, never gave the gunners a chance to use them effectively. Eventually the battery succeeded in knocking over a barn and two haystacks in a field half a mile the other side of the creek, but it did no damage to the Métis.

A fine rain was falling and there was no wind. The dense smoke from exploding rifles and cannon hung in the still air, providing fine cover for the deadly riflemen who joked and laughed as they shot the young militiamen

down. The militiamen fought back with dogged courage. No one thought of retreat. But to advance to the rim of the ravine was death. The only thing to do was to lie low, keep on firing, and hope that the Métis, like their Indian brothers, had no stomach for a sustained fight.

Middleton, seeing that his frontal attack was getting nowhere, now made an attempt to outflank and surround the enemy. He sent a detachment of Scouts to cross the creek at a point far to the east of the main battle. But the Métis snipers were everywhere, moving with lightning speed along the creek-bed to confront the Scouts. Middleton, realizing that the flanking movement could not be accomplished without heavy loss, at length called the Scouts off.

On the opposite side of the river lay the strong force of militia which Middleton had sent across the previous day. When the fighting began this force was camped four miles up-river from Fish Creek. Hearing the rattle of rifle-fire, the militiamen moved down fast to a point opposite the mouth of the creek. Here they waited, wild with impatience, for orders to cross the river and join in the action.

But Middleton's system of communication by means of bugle notes broke down completely. No one could hear the bugles in the noise of gun-fire. After a while the officers of the frustrated militia units saw a man beckoning wildly from the opposite shore, and rightly concluded that Middleton wanted them to cross over at once. But the turgid flooded river lay between them and the battlefield, and the old scow was still the only means of transport. It

took the frantic troops several hours to make the crossing. To their utter disgust they missed nearly all the fighting, but arrived in time to do picket-and-fatigue duty. Thus Middleton through his own short-sightedness actually deprived himself during the battle of half his effective command.

The slow hours dragged on. The guns of the battery banged away spasmodically, dropping hundreds of shells into the open prairie. The militiamen lay flat on the ground, seldom venturing to raise their heads. One detachment, attempting a flanking movement, was pinned down for nearly three hours in a muddy swamp—cold, waterlogged and helpless. From time to time small groups of soldiers, maddened by inaction and mosquito bites, scrambled to their feet and made a rush to the edge of the ravine, only to be driven back by the deadly accurate fire from below. A few of the men got so close to the enemy that they could hear the low whistles—like a boatswain's piping, they said—which the Métis used to communicate with one another.

The sun came out, and to the astonishment of the militiamen the Métis down in the ravine struck up a song:

Malbrouck s'en va-t-en guerre-a!
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine.
Malbrouck s'en va-t-en guerre-a!
..Ne sait quand reviendra.
(Malbrouck has gone a-fighting!
But when will he return?)

The song reflected the common blood-origin of the Métis and the French Canadians. It was composed and sung by the French soldiers during their war against the English

Duke of Marlborough early in the eighteenth century. Now, nearly two hundred years later, it was sung by the Métis in the rifle-pits of Fish Creek; and by a French-Canadian militia battalion, the 65th Rifles of Montreal under the command of General Strange, as they plodded through the mosquito-ridden northern forests in pursuit of Big Bear.

The Métis sang in the midst of battle. And they prayed too, for they were men of strong and simple faith. "We prayed all day," one of them said after the battle. "And I think prayer did more than bullets."

Gabriel Dumont was everywhere, encouraging his men to be of good heart. "Don't be afraid of bullets," he called out, laughing. "They won't hurt you." And indeed, the fire of the militiamen was so inaccurate that the Métis were in little danger so long as they kept to their coverts.

But though Dumont laughed, and joked with his men, he grew increasingly worried as the long day wore on. Most of the Indians, and some of the Métis who were concerned about their homes and families, had already deserted. Ammunition was running dangerously low. Gabriel had sent to Batoche for help, and he encouraged his men to believe that reinforcements were on the way. But the militia were on the move again, once more attempting to outflank the defenders of the ravine. Daringly, Dumont decided to go on the offensive.

The sun had dried the grass and underbrush, and a wind had sprung up, blowing towards the militia lines. The Métis, on Dumont's orders, set fire to the grass at the edge

of the ravine. Under cover of rolling smoke they charged the militia, firing as they ran.

In spite of the storm of lead that poured at them out of the smoke clouds, the soldiers didn't panic. An heroic little drummer-boy of the 90th Rifles won praise from Middleton himself for the way he hustled back and forth among the militiamen, heedless of danger and calling out in a clear shrill voice, "Now boys, who's for more cartridges?" His spirit infected the rest of the troops. At the first onset they had given back a little. Now they re-formed their line and held fast. A group of teamsters dashed forward and attempted to put out the fire. The Métis, unable to shoot accurately through the smoke clouds, retreated back into the ravine.

Night was falling, the rain coming on again. Heavily this time. The militia officers begged Middleton to order a charge. Three hundred soldiers, they said, could easily clear the ravine at bayonet point. Middleton knew that the officers were right. But he also knew that many men would die in a direct assault on the Métis position. The troops were fed up with lying in the grass and firing at an enemy they hardly ever saw. They would charge recklessly, and the Métis would mow them down in scores before breaking from their coverts. Middleton refused to order the charge.

Eighty mounted men rode up from Batoche to reinforce the Métis. But Gabriel Dumont decided against continuing the fight. He had lost only four or five men, but the rain was coming down in torrents, ammunition was almost

out, and the force of militia from the other side of the river was now ready for action, so that there were nearly eight hundred soldiers opposed to fewer than two hundred Métis.

Dumont ordered his exhausted warriors to return to Batoche. Silently they filed out of their shelters, mounted their horses and rode away in the darkness.

That night the militiamen pitched their tents a mile or two back from Fish Creek ravine. They were worn out and starving, for they had had nothing to eat all day. There was no laughter in the tents or around the campfires. For the first time the youngsters of the North-West Field Force understood the meaning of war. In a tent set a little apart from the others lay the bodies of ten men who had fallen in action. And in another tent, lantern-lit, an over-worked blood-splattered surgeon toiled all night long, patching up forty wounded men, probing for bullets, amputating mangled limbs. Hospital services for the Force proved to be wholly inadequate, and many of the wounded endured agonizing pain because there was no one to give them the skilled attention they needed.

Today, the battlefield of Fish Creek looks much as it did in 1885. It is a lonely place, standing high on the banks of the South Saskatchewan. The creek still winds sluggishly through the deep narrow ravine, and the old buffalo trails in which the Métis sharpshooters crouched and shot at the troops on the skyline are still clearly visible.

In a meadow a short distance from the creek stands a headstone marking the graves of three gunners who were

killed in action. Overshadowing the simple headstone is a cairn commemorating the Battle of Fish Creek. Inscribed on a bronze plate set in the cairn are the words: *When General Middleton was moving to capture Batoche his forces were attacked on 24th of April, 1885, by the half-breeds under Gabriel Dumont from concealed rifle pits near the mouth of the Fish Creek. The rebels were defeated and driven from the field.*

Gabriel Dumont would have laughed at that. And even Middleton would have admitted grumpily that the boastful statement on the bronze plate was just another "nor'-wester".

12. The Relief of Battleford

Colonel Otter, the officer in command of the Swift Current column, was a man in a hurry. On the way west he had refused to let the Queen's Own Rifles stop at Port Arthur to eat a hot meal the people of the town had prepared for them. His hustling tactics did not make him popular with his men, but they did enable him to get his force to Swift Current and ready to march in remarkably quick time. When the order came from Middleton to go to the relief of Battleford, 160 miles north of Swift Current, Otter was able to get his column moving almost at once.

Otter's force numbered about five hundred men. It included several companies of the Queen's Own Rifles, a battery of the Royal Canadian Artillery (permanent force), a detachment of the Governor-General's Footguards from Ottawa, and fifty Mounted Police from Regina under the command of Colonel Herchmer.

The column forded the South Saskatchewan about thirty miles out of Swift Current and marched into wild rolling country dotted with sloughs and here and there a fresh-water like. The weather was mild, and the men were able to take turns riding on the transport wagons, so that the

march was easy by comparison with that of Middleton's force. The men pitched their tents early, while there was still daylight, and were up and away at the crack of dawn. Colonel Herchmer and his detachment of Police acted as scouts.

The column presented a fine warlike appearance as it advanced across the prairie. The uniforms of the militia and Police looked gay and colourful against the drab prairie background—the grass was just beginning to show green in spots—and their rifle barrels glittered in the bright sunlight. The Indians were apparently impressed. They made no attempt to raid the column or pick off straggling supply wagons. One scout exchanged shots with a party of Indians, but no one was hurt. Otherwise the only shooting which enlivened the march was at ducks and prairie chicken. The game-birds made a welcome addition to the soldiers' diet. Otter hadn't been waiting in Swift Current long enough to organize an adequate transport system, and food was in short supply.

In the Eagle Hills country south of Battleford the troops took extra precautions to guard against attack, for they were now in the country of the rebellious Crees and Assiniboines. But no Indians appeared. There were signs of their earlier activities, though. The troops passed several plundered homes of white settlers who had fled for their lives to the safety of the Battleford stockade.

Just five days out of Swift Current Otter's force reached the rim of the Battle River valley, and saw the town of Battleford in the distance below. The men had covered

160 miles in five days, a remarkable feat of endurance considering that they were marching through unknown and rugged country. They were all in fine shape and spoiling for a fight, but Otter decided to pitch camp for the night a mile or two from the besieged town. His decision was a serious error in judgement. No doubt he thought that the Indians would all run away at sight of the troops. Instead, they seized a last opportunity to plunder and burn a few still-undamaged homes in the old town across the river from the stockade.

That night the men of Otter's force saw columns of smoke and flame rising from the old town. A veteran police scout, Charlie Ross, obtained permission from Otter to lead a patrol towards the town, and soon found himself almost surrounded by Indians skulking in the bushes. A few shots were exchanged, but no damage done on either side. The scouts slipped back into camp, and the Indians, whooping shrilly, vanished into the darkness of the Eagle Hills.

The next morning the troops struck their tents and marched the remaining two miles into Battleford. They were wildly cheered by the happy people who for nearly a month had been shut up on short rations inside the cramped stockade. No one was happier than Colonel Morris, the officer in charge of the Battleford detachment of Mounted Police, for now the fearful weight of responsibility for the lives of several hundred women and children was lifted from his shoulders.

The militiamen couldn't help strutting a bit as they

walked around the town. They had marched like veterans, they had acquired wonderful coats of tan, and now they were heroes basking in the smiles of the fair ladies of Battleford even though they hadn't fired a shot. They were proud and they were restless. So too, unfortunately, was Colonel Otter.

Otter knew that Middleton, his Commander-in-Chief, was an extremely cautious man. Under his orders a subordinate wasn't likely to see much dashing action. But Otter was apparently determined to win fame on his own account. In an extraordinary move he went over the head of Middleton and appealed directly to the Honourable

Edgar Dewdney, Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Territories, for permission to attack Poundmaker, chief of the Eagle Hills Crees, on his own ground.

No satisfactory explanation of Otter's action has ever been offered. True, Poundmaker's braves had been on a mild rampage for a month or more (without doing a great deal of damage except to a few houses). But the information Otter received when he was at Battleford made it clear that Poundmaker had succeeded in collecting his unruly young men and holding them in camp about forty miles west of the town.

Poundmaker, tall, handsome and in the prime of life,

was a very wise man. He had never liked war. Men who knew him well reported that he was prouder of having made peace between the Crees and their traditional enemies, the Blackfoot, than of any of his personal exploits in battle. The great fighters of the past years, he said, were not any good except in time of war. "They took no care of their families. They saved nothing, and did not care to work at anything except fight and steal horses." He cherished the legends of his people. He was the greatest story-teller among them, and the stories he liked best were those which told of peace and happiness and not of war.

Undoubtedly Poundmaker was deeply concerned about the plight of the Indians in the years following the disappearance of the buffalo, and angered by the refusal of the Government to take more active steps to help them. He had become increasingly hostile in his attitude towards the Mounted Police, whom he had once liked and trusted. It was almost certain, though—and Otter must have known this—that with the arrival of a powerful force of militia at Battleford, Poundmaker would do everything he could to hold his braves in check. For he knew that in the long run the Indians, even though allied with the Métis, could never hope to defeat the armies of the Great Queen.

But Otter was determined to teach Poundmaker a lesson he wouldn't forget. Very unwisely Governor Dewdney, without consulting Middleton, gave Otter permission to act on his own initiative. He did add a note of warning to his telegram of approval—*Sandhills most dangerous ground to march through. Be sure to secure good reliable*

scouts. But Otter didn't pay much attention to the warning. After all, what could a few ill-armed Indians do against a force of four hundred well-equipped militia and Police?

Otter quickly got his force in marching order and moved out of Battleford towards the Cree encampment forty miles away. The men were in the highest spirits. No shadow of what lay ahead darkened their joy. The Police under Colonel Herchmer led the way. Several of the men of the Fort Pitt detachment were now under Herchmer's command. They had begged permission to take part in the attack on Poundmaker, for their expulsion from Fort Pitt still rankled, and they wanted a chance to cancel out their debt to the Indians. One of the Fort Pitt Policemen, Corporal Sleigh, had kept a diary, since of interest and value to historians, covering the siege of the Fort and the withdrawal of the Police down-river to Battleford. No doubt Sleigh hoped that the raid on Poundmaker's camp would provide him with further exciting material for his diary.

The troops moved out of Battleford late in the afternoon of May 1st: the Queen's Own Rifles, Ottawa Footguards, a battery of two cannon and a Gatling gun, the Police detachment, a unit of the Battleford Home Guard, and a long column of provision and ammunition wagons. The citizens of Battleford cheered, and the ladies blew kisses to the soldiers. And the soldiers marched proudly out of the town, up the long slope of the Battle River valley, and on over the rolling hills towards Poundmaker's camp and death.

13. Disaster at Cut Knife

SINCE Otter planned to attack at daybreak, the march was a leisurely one. When the troops stopped for their evening meal of the inevitable corned beef, hard-tack and tea, they had covered about half the distance to Poundmaker's camp. The men lingered around their campfires until nearly midnight. They watched the moon rise in a velvety sky and saw the surrounding hills change from black to silver in the moonlight. It was a scene of rare and tranquil beauty that they looked upon—one in which violence and bloodshed had no place.

The trail to Poundmaker's camp was easy to follow, even at night. A strong scouting party of Mounted Police rode ahead of the main column, but saw no Indians. No rifle shots, no fierce war-whoops disturbed the quiet beauty of the countryside through which the troops were passing. If Poundmaker knew that a column of soldiers was advancing on his camp he gave no sign.

The rising sun flushed the humped summits of the Eagle Hills. The troops roused themselves and walked beside the wagons to restore circulation to their stiffened legs, for the night had been cold. They talked to one another in whispers, even though the creaking wagons made

enough noise to be heard a mile off, for they knew that they were now close to the Indians. Poundmaker, the scouts discovered, had withdrawn his camp from its site of a day or two before, but he could not have gone far. As was characteristic of nearly all troop movements during the Rebellion, Otter's advance was being made without precise knowledge of the enemy's whereabouts.

The column wound down into the deep tortuous ravine of Cut Knife Creek. The creek was a typical prairie stream —shallow, slow-moving, winding its way through a deeply eroded channel which in depth seemed out of all proportion to the size of the stream. The banks and flats along the creek were densely wooded, providing excellent cover for ambush.

But the scene was peaceful. The swollen creek slid leisurely through the seemingly deserted ravine, between green-tinged willow and poplar, past little meadows thick with early wildflowers. On a nearby hillside a herd of cattle grazed. They paid no attention to the strange lumbering procession winding past their pasture grounds. The column advanced steadily down the ravine. The scouts rode well ahead, and each man carried his rifle loaded and ready.

The advance units of the column—the Police and a company of the Queen's Own Rifles—climbed out of the ravine and up the long slope of a wooded hill that dominated the surrounding countryside. The hill, called Cut Knife after a famous Sarcee warrior, was a landmark for miles around. According to Indian tradition the Crees had defeated Cut

Knife in a great battle fought in the vicinity of the hill.

From his look-out on the hill-top a Cree warrior saw the advancing troops and rode off at top speed to give the alarm. The Indian encampment—tepees crowded with men, women and children—was pitched on a plateau of which the hill formed the crown. Indians don't like to get up very early in the morning; only a few of the men were about when the sentry galloped up and shouted the alarm.

Had the advance units of Police and militia which now occupied the crest of Cut Knife Hill at once charged the Indian camp it is probable that Otter would have won a quick and decisive victory, for he had caught the Indians almost completely off guard. But instead of pressing their advantage the advance units hesitated, then dug in to wait for the rest of the column to come up. In a few minutes the Indian women and children had fled from the camp to the shelter of innumerable ravines that seamed the surrounding countryside, and the braves were creeping up the hill through the dense undergrowth, shooting at the figures silhouetted against the skyline above. The Indians, like the Métis, knew that it was easier to shoot straight uphill than down.

The Police and militiamen, now extended loosely along the crest of the hill, fired back at the stealthy creeping enemy. The Indians pressed their attack with surprising vigour. The battery of artillery had now come up, and was dropping shells into the deserted camp below the hill. The Indians, armed only with muzzle-loaders, attempted to rush the guns. They charged from the shelter of the underbrush, waving blankets to distract the fire of the defenders, then dropped to the ground and blasted away at short range.

But the Police saved the guns. Among those who died fighting off the fierce Indian charge was Corporal Sleigh of the Fort Pitt detachment. He had made his last entry in his precious diary.

It was soon apparent that Otter had got himself into a

hopeless position. Puffs of smoke were rising from the bushes on all sides of the harassed troops. They fought back with grim courage, but like their comrades at Fish Creek they shot "blind". The Indians rarely showed themselves and they never appeared in the same place twice.

As the morning wore on the plight of the troops grew steadily worse. A rotting wooden gun-carriage collapsed, putting one of the two cannon out of commission. The newly invented machine-gun, called a Gatling, sprayed bullets right and left but never hit anything except the prairie. The troops decided that the Gatling would be fine

for shooting into a solid mass of the enemy, but it was just a noisy nuisance when used against wily foes who buzzed around like angry mosquitoes and never settled anywhere.

The Indians were outnumbered two to one. Some of the "braves" were mere teen-age boys armed with old Hudson's Bay muskets that threatened to blow apart each time they were fired, and even bows and arrows. But the Indians fought from cover. The troops in their bright uniforms were exposed and vulnerable on the hillside. On the dreadful ridge they lay flat on the ground, trying almost to burrow into the ground.

A comrade lying beside John Rodgers of the Ottawa Guards asked the young militia private a question. Rodgers was startled. "What's that?" he said—and lifted his head. A bullet struck him between the eyes and he rolled over and died.

Indians weren't supposed to like sustained action from a defensive position—they preferred wide open hit-and-run warfare. But now they were actually out-manoeuvring the troops, they were closing in behind, cutting off the escape route through Cut Knife ravine. Not a moment too soon Otter ordered that the rear be cleared of encircling Indians. A few Mounted Police and men of the ill-trained Battleford Home Guard carried out the difficult job with extraordinary determination and daring. They forced a wedge between the Indians, rolled them back on both sides and thus created an avenue through which the troops could pass when they began their retreat.

For retreat they must. There was no hope now of clearing out the enemy from the innumerable brush coverts and ravines that fringed the hill and creek. The Indians shifted from one position to another like quicksilver. They were nowhere and everywhere at once. The only question now was, could the troops withdraw without heavy loss?

As things turned out, the one phase of the entire operation in which Otter could take a little pride was his handling of the retreat. The troops saved the guns—even the one whose carriage had collapsed. They made their way slowly down the terrible hill, placed their dead and wounded in the wagons, and with rear-guard and flanking detachments holding off desultory Indian attacks, wound through the Cut Knife ravine and back to the comparative safety of the high uplands.

Two factors which had nothing to do with his leadership greatly assisted Otter in his successful withdrawal. One was the instinctive Indian unwillingness to follow up a victory. War among the plains tribes was conducted according to a fairly rigid sporting code. You met your enemy in a pitched battle, and when you or your enemy fled the battle was over. The defeated retired to their camp to nurse their wounds and plan to fight another day; and the victors returned to *their* camp with whatever spoils they had won on the field of battle, feasted in triumph, exhibited scalps and boasted of deeds of individual valour.

The second factor was Poundmaker. Many of the braves, roused to a high pitch of excitement by their unexpected victory over the white men, were eager to pursue the re-

treating column and harass it from the shelter of bluffs and ravines. Had Poundmaker's full strength been so employed it is possible that Otter's force might have been annihilated, for the troops were worn out and dispirited after seven hours of fighting for their lives.

But Poundmaker refused to let his warriors go after the retreating column. So the weary soldiers trailed back to Battleford unopposed, carrying with them in the wagons eight dead and fourteen wounded. Only a handful of Indians fell in the battle.

The Cut Knife expedition accomplished nothing and lost

a great deal. The ill-armed Indians had defeated a well-armed force of twice their number; and news of their victory spread quickly to all the tribes in the North-West. Undoubtedly only the wisdom and far-sightedness of a few great chiefs like Crowfoot of the Blackfoot averted a general rising at this time among the Indians.

Moreover, the Cut Knife fiasco increased the Indian's growing distrust of the white man. Poundmaker, who for so long had sought to avoid open warfare against the whites, was especially distressed and bitter. (Indeed, many of Otter's troops had been themselves upset when they learned that the purpose of the expedition was a surprise attack on a sleeping camp full of women and children.) Shortly after the Cut Knife fight, Poundmaker gave up his long struggle to keep his braves under control. The Eagle Hills Crees celebrated their victory with the traditional feasting and dancing, then moved slowly toward Batoche to join Riel.

What General Middleton said when he heard of the Cut Knife disaster has not been recorded, perhaps because most of it was unprintable. He was furious, and rightly so. Otter had gone over his head for authority—a shocking insult to the old general—and then come within an eye-lash of "committing Custer". But at least the general was confirmed in his policy of caution. You took no chances when fighting enemies as tough and wily as the Métis and Indians.

Colonel Otter had learned the hard way that it takes more than hustle to make a good Indian fighter.

14. The Advance on Batoche

At Fish Creek the men of the North-West Field Force waited impatiently for the order to advance on Batoche. They found the monotony of camping on the open prairie, with nothing to do except drill occasionally in a half-hearted sort of way, almost unendurable. There was lots of food now, but it lacked variety. All the men were sick of corned beef, and the jaw-breaking hard-tack biscuits which, so everyone agreed, would be more effective as armour-plating than as food. Morale dropped steadily lower. The men knew they hadn't put up much of a show at Fish Creek. They had been checked by a force less than half their number, and they were desperately eager to show that that sort of thing couldn't happen twice. They had learned a lot, they felt, in their first engagement. Next time the only dead men on the battlefield would be Métis.

Fish Creek wasn't the only place where the morale of the troops was low. At Prince Albert and several other points two hundred Mounted Policemen twiddled their thumbs and tried to endure with patience the jeers of the townsfolk who openly compared the once-proud guardians of the plains to gophers afraid to stick their heads out of their holes. But the Police were under Middleton's command. They couldn't move unless he ordered them to.

He never did. To the end of the campaign Middleton kept a powerful force of Mounties immobilized and virtually useless. The old general had apparently decided that it would be easier to beat the Métis with the green men of the Militia than with the magnificently trained and equipped Police cavalry. By keeping the Mounties out of the fight Middleton, wittingly or unwittingly, dealt the prestige of the Force a blow from which it did not recover for many years.

The militiamen grumbled, the Police grumbled, the officers—except the favoured Old Country few who enjoyed Middleton's confidence—grumbled, and General Middleton sat in the middle of the prairie and waited for reinforcements. Meanwhile the troops drilled, mended their uniforms, shot rabbits and plundered the Métis farmhouses in the vicinity of Fish Creek.

The plundering was on a small and relatively innocent scale. Most of the decent young militia boys contented themselves with taking a few knick-knacks from the deserted cabins to show as souvenirs back home. Before coming West they had shared the popular belief that the Métis were half-naked savages living in tepees or primitive huts. They were amazed and taken aback to find that the Métis cabins were cosy and homelike, with bright curtains at the windows and coloured religious pictures on the walls. One newspaper correspondent wrote that the soldiers were coming to feel more and more strongly that the Métis had been cruelly wronged by the Government of Canada and by their fanatical leader, Louis Riel.

At last word reached Fish Creek that the steamer *Northcote*, coming down-river with two hundred troops, two machine-guns and a large quantity of supplies aboard, had reached Saskatoon, about twenty miles up-river from Fish Creek. At once there was wild excitement in camp, for these were the supplies and reinforcements that Middleton had been waiting for. But the *Northcote* had still twenty miles to go. For the next two or three days the chief occupation and entertainment of the troops was watching the heavily-laden steamer "grasshoppering" over the innumerable sand-bars that impeded her passage down-river.

Whenever the steamer ran aground on a bar—which happened several times a day—the crewmen set two tall heavy poles in the sand on either side, with their tops leaning slightly towards the bow. Cables, fastened to the gunwales, ran through tackle blocks at the tops of the poles, and were attached to steam-powered winches in the bow. When the winches turned, the cables lifted the steamer and hauled it forward a few feet. Then the poles were re-set and the operation repeated until the *Northcote* had almost literally hopped over the sand-bar into deep water.

Middleton had by this time given up his original plan of striking at Batoche from both sides of the river. Thus he had under his immediate command a force of nearly one thousand men—the Winnipeg Rifles, Toronto Royal Grenadiers, the Ontario Midland Battalion (made up of units from six counties), several batteries of artillery, Boulton's Scouts, French's Scouts, and a hastily organized Surveyors' Corps recruited from Dominion survey parties throughout the West.

On the morning of May 7th the North-West Field Force wheeled into formation and, with Boulton's Scouts leading the way, marched past the hastily erected stone cairn honouring the dead of Fish Creek and swung north across the prairie towards Batoche.

The day was beautiful, as only a spring day on the prairie can be—bright sunshine, a cool breeze, and the ground studded with early spring flowers, the purple crocus vivid against the pale green of the new grass. The troops were in high spirits. They were moving towards the decisive battle of the war—the only one that really mattered—and they were determined this time to win the glory that had so far eluded them.

But there was to be no furious all-out assault on Batoche. Middleton moved with his usual infinite caution. The troops, he admitted, had learned a bit about fighting at Fish Creek, but they still weren't real soldiers. Accordingly, instead of advancing directly on the enemy stronghold, he called a halt about six miles from Batoche. The next morning he led the troops away from the river on a detour that took them several miles from the settlement. There was good reason for the manoeuvre. Middleton knew that by moving in on Batoche from the open prairie instead of along the thickly-wooded gully-seamed river bank he would reduce the danger of ambush to a minimum.

The artillery, Middleton hoped, would be able to dominate the settlement clinging along the river bank; and the *Northcote*, now converted into a gunboat, would attack with cannon and small-arms fire from the river itself. The Métis would thus be caught in the jaws of a trap. If all

went well, Middleton thought, a couple of hours' steady pressure should do the trick. Not that he underestimated the fighting capacities of the Métis. As a youth he had campaigned in the forests of New Zealand against the Maori, and he knew that native peoples could fight like fury in defence of their homes. Besides, he hadn't forgotten Fish Creek.

On the morning of Saturday, May 9th, 1885, the men of the North-West Field Force moved cautiously through beautiful pastoral countryside towards the stronghold of the Métis. They marched past deserted homes in an atmosphere of strange stillness and peace. The more sensitive of the soldiers were more than ever conscious of the folly of the war in which they were now engaged. For this was a country a man could love passionately, and what, after all, were the Métis doing except fighting for the land they looked upon as their own?

Some of these young soldiers remembered the lines they had learned not so long ago in school, about how Horatius kept the bridge and why:

> And how can man die better
> Than facing fearful odds
> For the ashes of his fathers,
> And the temples of his gods?

Now it suddenly occurred to them that maybe the Métis felt the same way as Horatius did.

From the river came a wholly unexpected sound of gunfire. The *Northcote*'s shrill whistle split the morning air. Middleton raged—the gunboat had gone into action too

soon. The scouts wheeled away from their positions up front and galloped back for orders. The militiamen gripped their rifles with suddenly sweating hands and gulped deep breaths of air in an effort to fill the great empty spaces in lungs and stomach. And down in the rifle-pits of Batoche Gabriel Dumont gave orders to his sharpshooters; and the Métis loaded their rifles and said their prayers and prepared to fight a last battle in defence of the land and the life they loved.

15. *Gunboat on the Prairie*

MIDDLETON'S plan to turn the old tub *Northcote* into a gunboat wasn't greeted with much enthusiasm by the civilian crew, or the militiamen whom he ordered to go aboard in the role of marines. The *Northcote*'s cruising speed was about five miles an hour. She had no bulwarks, her engines were old and tired and so were most of her crew. But nothing would swerve the general from his elaborate plan of joint land and sea operations. Reluctantly the civilian crew, aided by a few unhappy militiamen, tore down Gabriel Dumont's barn and built bulwarks with the planks. (They also took on board Gabriel's washing-machine and billiard table.) They padded the joints of the bulwarks with bags of oats, left a few gaps here and there between the planks to serve as loopholes, and hoped for the best.

When the *Northcote* took off on her epic cruise to Batoche she carried a civilian crew of fifteen, thirty-five militiamen, and—since she was also being used as a floating hospital—a number of sick and wounded below decks. Her armament consisted of one cannon insecurely moored amidships, and a Gatling gun. The men on board were under the over-all command, not of a regular militia officer but the Warden of the Manitoba Penitentiary!

The *Northcote* started downstream lugging two barges heavily laden with supplies and tooting her whistle with a fine show of enthusiasm. But nobody on board was very happy about the enterprise. Least of all the two civilian captains, Sheets and Seager, whose duty compelled them to occupy an exposed position in the pilot house. The river was wide but the banks were high. The captains knew that the Métis, if they were on the alert, could get in some fine target practice taking pot-shots at any man who stuck his head above the bulwarks. Sitting ducks, that's what they were, Captain Sheets grumbled, and no one aboard dared to contradict him.

According to the plan dreamed up by Middleton, the *Northcote* would arrive opposite Batoche just as Middleton launched his attack from the land side. The men on board would pour shells into the settlement and rake it with small-arms volleys from rifles and the Gatling gun. The Métis, thus quite literally caught between two fires, wouldn't know which way to turn. But the *Northcote* slid down the swollen river much faster than anyone had expected and arrived at Batoche considerably ahead of schedule. The Métis, who had watched the progress of the *Northcote* from the moment she cast off, rode out along the high banks of the river to meet her. Gabriel Dumont had a score to settle with the crew of the *Northcote*. He knew they had stolen his precious billiard table.

The *Northcote* reached a point where the river narrowed and a long sand-bar jutted out almost to mid-stream. The pilot was compelled to swing the boat close inshore. From

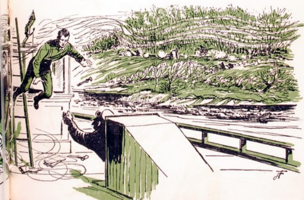
the bushes that lined the high bank above came the crackle of rifle-fire. The soldiers aboard the *Northcote* flung themselves behind the breastworks and fired back. Lieutenant Hugh Macdonald, son of the Prime Minister of Canada, hospitalized with a severe attack of erysipelas, crawled from his sick-bed to take part in the action. As usual, the militiamen couldn't see the enemy. But they could hear bullets whistling close over their heads or smacking solidly into the bulwarks.

The helmsman, a bullet through his coat-tails, abandoned the heel and ducked for cover. The *Northcote* swung back and forth in the channel so close to shore that several daring Métis attempted to jump aboard the barges, but miraculously she did not go aground. Gabriel Dumont, directing operations from high up on the bank, signalled his men to move downstream, keeping abreast of the harassed gunboat. The Métis didn't hit many of the men aboard—they were huddled too close to the bulwarks—but it was fun to see the splinters fly.

Captains Sheets and Seager got the boat out into the middle of the river again, and the engine crew built up a fine head of steam. The *Northcote* reached a point almost opposite Batoche. Suddenly Captain Sheets signalled in wild alarm for full speed ahead. The bow of the *Northcote* was almost directly below a great overhead ferry-cable spanning the river. And the cable was coming down fast. Gabriel Dumont had loosed it from its shore moorings, hoping to catch the *Northcote* under her bow.

But he delayed a few seconds too long. The cable missed the bow and lit squarely on deck. It sliced off the top of the pilot house, the whistle, the smokestacks and the mast. Thus shorn the *Northcote* blundered on, hind end foremost now and on fire.

The crew got the fire out and managed to bring the *Northcote* to anchor in deep water four miles below Batoche. The Métis still took occasional pot-shots at her, and the militiamen dutifully replied. They never came close to hitting anybody, but at least they kept themselves



busy. Most of the civilian crew remained below deck. They weren't being paid, they said, to be shot at.

Only once during their perilous voyage did the men aboard the *Northcote* see any of the action on shore—they caught a fleeting glimpse of red coats advancing through the trees on the high bluffs above Batoche. They were cut off and unhappy, for they couldn't communicate with anyone now that the precious whistle was out of action. Previously they had worked out a code so that they could keep in touch with those on shore. But now the *Northcote* was tootless, and the men on board felt out of things and lonely, sitting there in the middle of the Saskatchewan.

After a while the officer commanding the militia called for volunteers to repair the whistle. No doubt he expected the unit to step forward in a solid body. But nothing of the sort happened. The whistle was on top of what was left of the pilot house, and there were Métis snipers lurking in the bushes along the shore. The men looked at one another furtively and stayed where they were.

The commanding officer's face grew dark with wrath. Was the *Northcote* to remain silent to the end of the campaign, no cheerful toot proclaiming that morale was high and all was well?

Apparently so. Until Private Coombes of the Toronto Infantry School Corps stepped forward. "I'll fix it, sir," he said. And added firmly, "For fifty dollars."

Private Coombes got the fifty dollars. A sniper opened up on him just as he finished the repair job and he had to jump for his life. But thereafter the *Northcote* was able

to whistle loud and long. Unfortunately, the din on shore was so great that nobody heard her.

Some of the more eager spirits on board urged that a head of steam be built up and the boat taken back up-river to bombard Batoche. But Captains Sheets and Seager flatly refused to do anything of the kind. It was all very well, they said, for the soldiers to play at being heroes. *They* could hide behind the bulwarks. But what about the men in the pilot house, namely, Captains Sheets and Seager, who on the run down had dodged more Métis bullets than all the militiamen put together?

The frustrated officer commanding the militia tried to assert some authority. It was imperative, he said, that the *Northcote* proceed upstream and attack Batoche at once. But the doughty captains confounded him by producing a copy of their orders. Middleton, they pointed out, had ordered them to proceed *down*-stream. If, therefore, they turned around and went *up*-stream they would be disobeying the orders of their Commander-in-Chief.

So during the four days' Battle of Batoche the *Northcote* lay uneasily at anchor several miles below the scene of action. Casualties aboard totalled three men wounded by Métis bullets, and two slightly injured when the smoke-stacks fell on them. Middleton's naval expedition had imperilled lives, deprived the land force of the services of thirty-five militiamen, and accomplished nothing except to give the Métis some excellent shooting practice.

But no doubt Middleton got some satisfaction out of the knowledge that he was the first commander—and certainly the last—ever to use a gunboat on the prairies.

16. The Siege of Batoche

Gabriel Dumont moved among the rifle-pits that lined the hillsides around Batoche, speaking words of encouragement and reassurance to the men who crouched in the pits waiting for a renewal of the enemy attack. He was exposed to fire from the high ground but he moved without fear. And without hope.

Without fear, because he knew that the militiamen were poor shots, and he was almost out of range of their rifles. Without hope, because he knew that the Métis could not hold out forever against a thousand well-armed men, two batteries of artillery and a Gatling gun.

But he was satisfied that he had done all a man could do. The defences of Batoche were strong. Rifle-pits everywhere—on the hillsides, in the meadows, behind the cabins of the settlement. The militiamen must expose themselves against the skyline if they were to advance down on the rifle-pits, and then they could be picked off with ease. Gabriel himself shot militiamen as he had once shot the buffalo—from necessity and without hate, and with joy in his skill as a marksman.

The siege had lasted for three days now, and for three days the pattern of attack had been the same. Middleton,

Gabriel decided, was a stubborn man. Or else a man whose head couldn't hold more than one idea at a time. Each morning at sunrise the troops moved out of the big stockade they had built with transport wagons a mile or two back on the plain; they spread out in skirmishing order, advanced towards the settlement, then flopped down on their stomachs and wriggled cautiously forward towards the edge of the high bluffs. Occasionally a handful of the more daring among them would dash forward and loom up against the skyline, then scurry back for shelter leaving one or two dead or wounded behind. The militiamen, Gabriel thought, were a nuisance but that was about all.

The big guns, though, were bad. Much worse than at Fish Creek. They kept dropping shells into the settlement. They had hit several buildings and killed two people. Most of the women and children were hiding out in brush coverts and ravines well away from the village, but there were always a few stupid folk wandering about where they had no business to be.

Dumont was without hope. Or almost. Word had come to the Métis that Poundmaker's Crees, enraged by Otter's attack on their camp, were on the march towards Batoche. If and when they arrived they'd be on the wrong side of the river for the fighting, but there was just a chance that their approach might alarm cautious old Middleton into withdrawing.

And then there was always that strange and wonderful man Riel, whom Gabriel loved and didn't understand. Riel who moved fearlessly among the Métis carrying the

crucifix and calling on the people to be of good courage and to prepare for a miracle of salvation. It was hard not to believe in the miracle when Riel spoke of it with such assurance.

But until the miracle happened there was work to do. Gabriel fired at a daring young militiaman whose red uniform showed for a moment on the crest of the hill above, and laughed when the red uniform crumpled into a shapeless huddle among the green shrubbery.

But although Riel was all the time going about among his people, encouraging the faint-hearted, praising the brave and comforting the dying, fear had come upon him like a cold winter wind. That part of his mind which was logical told him that the Métis cause was doomed; and that for himself there could be no end other than the one he had foreseen long ago in a terrible vision. A vision of a gallows high on a hill. But the fault, he was convinced, lay not in himself but in his people. They were weak and foolish, and God was now punishing them for their sins.

Undoubtedly many of the Métis were faint-hearted in their resistance. Throughout the revolt the burden of fighting fell heavily on two groups—the young men who craved excitement, and the very old who had no relatives dependent on them. The men with families to care for weren't anxious to expose themselves to sudden death. During the siege of Batoche they were constantly slipping away from the rifle-pits to find out how their wives and families were faring. Especially with the artillery shelling the cabins.

Night of the third day closed over the doomed stronghold. Sullenly the militia withdrew from their advanced positions back to the great stockade, where they ate a hasty supper and settled down for a night of fitful sleep. In the ravines and brush hide-outs along the river the Métis women and children and some of the menfolk huddled over flickering smoky fires and ate horsemeat and prayed.

But for Gabriel Dumont there was little food and no rest. All night long he prowled restlessly about the rifle-pits, encouraging his tired men and checking ammunition.

"Don't shoot—except to kill," he warned the men over and over again. For the ammunition was, as usual, running low. Enough left for a few hours' fighting, that was all.

No food except horsemeat, and hardly any ammunition. Dumont muttered his favourite prayer; *Oh Lord, strengthen my courage, my faith and my honour that I may profit all my life from the blessing I have received in Thy holy name.*

His courage, his faith and his honour were strong. But he knew they weren't enough to save Batoche and the Métis. Perhaps, even now, Riel might work a miracle. He had been praying all night long. Perhaps, even now, he would be able to save the Métis nation.

Daylight flushed the eastern sky. In the growing light Gabriel Dumont, crouched on the rim of a high bank, saw the troops pour out of the stockade and advance in skirmishing order. The guns on the flank rumbled, puffs of smoke kicked up in the village below.

The miracle hadn't happened. It wouldn't happen now. Today would mark the end of the fighting, for after today the Métis would have no ammunition left to fight with. Only faith and honour and courage remained.

Gabriel Dumont went back down the slope and told his men to get ready to receive the enemy.

17. Last Stand in the West

THE men of the North-West Field Force were fighting mad. For three days now they had gone through the same silly futile manoeuvres. The first day they had made their farthest advance—all the way to the church and parish house standing on high ground about a mile from the village. Inside the parish house they had found the priests and nuns of the Batoche Mission, unharmed but badly frightened. They had riddled a few deserted Métis cabins near the cemetery west of the church, and the gunners had dropped shells into the village. Then the infantry had tried to push forward beyond the church and had run into near-disaster. It was then that they discovered the rifle-pits.

Thus the dreary pattern developed. The troops drew back and established a line behind the church and pumped bullets into the air. The Métis sniped from their coverts. At nightfall the troops fell back to the big stockade which Middleton had insisted on setting up in the middle of a ploughed field. Dust from the field hung over the stockade in a dense haze. The militiamen looked at one another out of bloodshot eyes, washed down dust-coated hard-tack with muddy tea, and listened all night to bullets smacking against the wagons which formed the walls of the stockade.

Three days of fighting an invisible enemy. Three days of

hesitant advance and hasty withdrawal, of lying on your stomach and getting nowhere. Three nights of dust and cold and snatches of nightmare-ridden sleep. Sure, the Métis would have to give up some time. Their ammunition couldn't last forever. But where was the glorious dashing victory the troops had looked forward to so confidently when they set out from Fish Creek? One quick fierce charge and the war would be over. The Métis couldn't stand up to cold steel——

So the militiamen thought. But Middleton had no intention of ordering a charge. Too costly, he said. Six hundred Métis riflemen would mow the militia down. Middleton badly miscalculated the size of the Métis force. Actually, there were less than two hundred men in the rifle-pits.

Middleton's cautious tactics infuriated the soldiers. Everyone admitted that the old man was brave enough. He strode recklessly along the extended line like a stout red-faced turkey-cock, armed only with a cane, constantly urging the men to keep their heads down and hold their fire. But the men were fed up with keeping their heads down. One quick fierce charge——

At night wild rumours ran from tent to tent. It was reported that Middleton had at last called out the Mounted Police from Prince Albert to do the job the militiamen couldn't do—that he had ordered a withdrawal back to Fish Creek—that Batoche was to be starved into surrender without further fighting. When Middleton's Chief of Staff, Lord Melgund (later the Earl of Minto and Governor-General of Canada) hurriedly left the battlefield

after the first day's fighting, the story spread that he had gone to Ottawa to ask the Government to bring out a regiment of Imperial Army regulars from England. No rumour could have been better calculated to shake the soldiers' already wavering confidence in their Commander-in-Chief, or further lower their morale.

The morning of Tuesday, May 12th, broke clear and crisp—the kind of morning that tingled the flesh and set the blood racing and made a man feel there was nothing he couldn't do. The kind of morning that stirred even old General Middleton into realizing that his original plan of attack was getting nowhere and that he had better try something new.

Once he made up his mind he acted quickly. He personally led a force of 150 men on a wide flanking movement to threaten the Métis position from the north-east. The main body of infantry, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Van Straubenzie, an old Imperial Army officer and veteran of many wars, was under orders to hold its usual position until Middleton opened his attack, then drive forward and attempt to reach the heights overlooking the settlement.

The plan was well conceived but badly carried out. Throughout the campaign, communications between separated units nearly always broke down at critical moments. Middleton's staff seem to have followed to the letter the Biblical dictum, *Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.* This time the communication system ran true to form. Middleton executed the flanking movement

quickly and skilfully, and opened up on the Métis with long-range fire. But the wind was blowing the wrong way. Van Straubenzie and his officers couldn't hear the firing, and concluded that Middleton hadn't attacked at all. When Middleton, in a fine rage over Van Straubenzie's failure to co-operate, rejoined the main force, he found the militiamen peacefully cooking their noon meal.

None the less the manoeuvre had two important results, both favourable to Middleton. It drew a considerable force of Métis out of the rifle-pits to cover the threatened flank; and it supplied Middleton with evidence of weakening Métis morale. For Louis Riel had recognized Middleton at a distance and sent him a message by John Astley, a surveyor whom Riel was holding prisoner in Batoche along with ten other white men.

I do not like war, Riel wrote. *But if you massacre our families we are going to kill the prisoners.*

Middleton was greatly encouraged by Riel's communication, which he rightly interpreted as a sign of growing desperation on the part of the Métis leader.

Early in the afternoon Middleton gave orders to the troops to advance to the positions they had held the previous day. Reluctantly the militiamen plodded off towards their designated positions—the Midland Battalion and French's Scouts on the left of the line nearest the river; the Royal Grenadiers and the Winnipeg 90th in the centre; Boulton's Scouts and the Surveyors' Corps on the right.

Lieutenant-Colonel Williams, officer commanding the

Midland Battalion, in private life a Member of Parliament, had had enough of the business of advancing a few yards, retreating a few yards, lying down for an hour or so and then repeating the whole dreary pattern. He was determined that this time things were going to be different. This time, when the Midlanders received the order to advance, they would keep right on going.

The word from Colonel Williams—"Halt when I halt and not before"—ran like an electric current down the Midlander line. It jumped from the Midlanders to the Grenadiers and the 90th Rifles. Excitement and joy showed in every face. This was it, boys! A quick dash to glory—and then home, sweet home!

The skirmishers for the second time in four days advanced as far as the bullet-scarred church, where Middleton established his headquarters. Presently, after a careful survey of the situation, he ordered the Midland Battalion to make a "reconnaissance in force". All he meant was that the Midlanders were to advance until they came within range of enemy fire and then lie down for the rest of the afternoon.

Not this time. Colonel Williams bellowed "Charge, boys, charge!" The Midlanders leapt to their feet, bayonets flashing in the sunlight, and rushed in a long thin line towards the slopes leading down into the river valley. The Winnipeg Rifles and the Grenadiers took their cue from the Midlanders and charged almost simultaneously, firing as fast as they could reload. It was a wild and inspiring

sight—a mile-long line of red and bottle-green sweeping forward over the prairie in a haze of flame-shot smoke.

But Middleton was not inspired. He was enraged and appalled. Something had gone terribly wrong.

"Cease firing!" the general bellowed. "Why in the name of God don't you cease firing?"

He might as well have yelled at a herd of stampeding cattle. No one listened to him. He ordered his bugler to blow the retreat and the bugler blew until both he and General Middleton were purple in the face. Yes, something had gone wrong. A thousand wild-eyed militiamen were running out of control!

The truth dawned on Middleton. There wasn't a thing he could do now except support the charge and hope for the best. He ordered up the reserves and sent Boulton's Scouts galloping into action on the right flank. Then he rode forward himself to direct the last phase of the attack.

From his position in one of the foremost rifle-pits

Gabriel Dumont saw the line of troops break over the crest above, and knew that the end had come. All around him the Métis were leaping from the rifle-pits and scattering for cover. He himself retreated for a short distance with the rest. Then he dug in and shot hard and fast into the advancing tide of militia that rolled forward through the underbrush in red and green waves.

Some men stayed with Dumont, fighting to the end. Men like José Ouellet, ninety-three years of age. José remembered the days of the Selkirk Settlement near the beginning of the century. He had lived through the Golden Age of the Métis nation and made the long trek west from Red River in 1870. José knew that now, in the hour of defeat, was the time for an old man to die. A gun in his hand, face to the enemy, so that the bullet holes would be in front.

"Father," Dumont said to José, "Father, we must retreat."

He said it several times, and each time the old man, grinning fiercely, replied, "Wait a minute. I want to kill another Englishman."

Then the bullets hit him and he tumbled into the rifle-pit. "Goodbye, old father," Dumont said quietly. "Thank you for your courage." And he left the rifle-pit and slipped back among the cabins.

Others stayed in the pits with José Ouellet. Like him they were mostly old men, and like him they were dead.

The women of the village cowered with their children in the shelter of ravines and river caves. They said their beads and chanted the Indian death-chants they had learned from their mothers and grandmothers long ago. The men fought on, from cabins ruined by shell-fire, from behind trees, from trenches dug in the sand-banks of the river. Gabriel Dumont and a few of his men still had bullets for their Winchesters. The rest crammed their muzzle-loaders with pebbles, nails, bits of scrap-iron—anything that would fly and hurt.

The militiamen fought their way doggedly from cabin to cabin. There wasn't much danger now from the muzzle-loaders, only the Winchesters. They stormed into Batoche House, the biggest building in the settlement, and freed the eleven white prisoners whom the Métis had kept shut up in the cellar. Captain French, the dashing commander of French's Scouts, rushed upstairs and thrust his head out of a window to shout orders at his men. A Métis sniper shot him in the face and the gallant officer died instantly.

Young William Hughes, a private of the Winnipeg

Rifles, bashed in the door of a half-ruined cabin and rushed inside, his rifle at the ready. He was flushed with the excitement of battle and victory. Through his mind ran the wonderful stories he would be able to tell the folks back home about his exploits on this heroic day. He tripped over a box-like object on the floor, got slowly to his feet and looked down at a body lying in an open casket. The body of a young Métis girl, not more than fifteen. She wore an embroidered burial dress and her hands were folded over the crucifix on her breast. She had been killed some time earlier in the fighting by a stray bullet.

Young William Hughes forgot all about the glories of war and the wonderful tales he had to tell. All by himself he lifted the casket from the floor and set it on a table by the wall where it would be safe from the stumbling feet of other militiamen. Then he said the Lord's Prayer and felt a little better. The girl's face, he thought, looked strangely beautiful in death.

Within an hour after the charge of the militiamen the fighting was over. The Métis women and children came out of their hiding-places to surrender; and soon afterwards the men, dejected and miserable, began to lay down their arms. But Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont had vanished.

Batoche had fallen and the North-West Rebellion was over. There was mourning among the Métis for fathers and sons lost in battle; and in many an Eastern Canadian home, parents and sweethearts wept for the unreturning brave who had died on the far-off plains in the most senseless and unnecessary war ever fought on Canadian soil.

18. The Flight of the Prince

Gabriel Dumont, Prince of the Prairies, was still defiant. He fled from the village of Batoche only to look for his leader, Louis Riel. Riel, so someone had told him, was wandering about distracted in the woods nearby. Dumont found Riel quickly. He was surrounded by a group of dejected Métis, whose only wish was to surrender.

"We are beaten, Gabriel," Riel said quietly. "What are we going to do?"

Dumont knew the answer to that. He patted the stock of his Winchester. "We must die, my cousin," he said.

And then, for the first time, he spoke the truth he had always known in his heart. "You must have known, Louis, that in taking up arms we should be defeated. Very well—they must destroy us."

But Louis Riel had no will to fight any longer. God had failed him. Dumont, realizing the hopelessness of trying to rouse his leader, went off to look for his wife Madeleine.

He never saw Riel again.

All night long Dumont ranged through the woods around Batoche. His only thought now was to ease the sufferings of his people. Riel was worse than useless, he had given up completely. But the lion-hearted Gabriel

carried blankets to his wife and other shivering refugees whom he found huddled among the trees, and brought them meat and flour from a cache on the outskirts of Batoche. He even found time to cut a pair of moccasins from cowhide for a child whose bare feet were bleeding.

His wife Madeleine wanted to go with the other women who were moving farther away from Batoche. But Gabriel asked her to stay where she was.

"If the soldiers catch you and blame you for what I've done," he said with an unexpected grin, "you can tell them that since the Government of Canada can't manage me they can hardly expect you to do so."

For three days and nights Dumont lurked in the woods near Batoche. Each day he moved his camp a little farther away from the settlement, but as soon as darkness fell he returned and prowled through the woods, looking for Louis Riel. Madeleine begged him to give up the search and seek his own safety. There was good reason for her concern. The woods were full of soldiers, and Dumont was a man with a price on his head.

On the third day after the fall of Batoche, Dumont took Madeleine to her father's place a few miles north of the settlement. He knew she would be safe there, for her father had taken no part in the revolt.

Old Isidore laid his hand on his son-in-law's shoulder and said, "My son, what are you going to do?"

A fierce light shone in Gabriel's dark eyes. "Shoot soldiers," he said tersely. "All summer I'm going to shoot soldiers."

The old man shook his head. "I am proud, my son, that you haven't surrendered. But if you stay here to kill people, now that the war is over, you'll be a fool. Why don't you run for the border, as Madeleine says?"

Dumont knew that his father-in-law was talking sense. A man couldn't fight a war all by himself.

"I'll go, father," he said. "If I can't find Riel."

He wanted to persuade Riel to go on fighting. He knew that only Riel could rally the defeated Métis, only the magic of his name and voice could revive the spirits of the men and induce them to carry on guerilla war all summer.

Dumont's brother-in-law, Moise Ouellet, told him that Riel had received a letter from Middleton promising fair trials to the Métis leaders if they gave themselves up. He advised Gabriel to surrender. Gabriel laughed contemptuously.

"I will never surrender," he said. "And neither will Louis."

"Louis has already surrendered," Moise Ouellet said quietly. "He is now Middleton's prisoner."

The news was a terrible blow to Dumont. But he remained defiant to the end. "Go to the devil!" he shouted at his brother-in-law who was again urging him to give himself up. "The Government has skinned you like sheep. It has disarmed you—and now you do just what you're told!"

"We surrendered for our children's sake, Gabriel," Moise Ouellet said. "I have eleven, you remember?"

His words pulled Gabriel up short. He himself was

childless. But he saw now that to carry on the fighting any longer would mean increased suffering for the women and children.

One parting shot, though. One last word of defiance. "Tell Middleton," he said to Moise Ouellet, "that I'm in the woods and I've ninety cartridges left for his men!"

At nightfall the next day the Prince of the Prairies swung onto his horse, the finest and fastest in all the Métis settlements, and headed south. He carried with him a few *galettes* (hard dry pancakes), which was all the food Madeleine could spare him for the long journey. But he wasn't worried much about food. So long as he had his rifle he could always live off the land. With him rode an old comrade-in-arms, Michel Dumas. Like Gabriel, Dumas preferred the dangers of flight to the ignominy of surrender. Better death from a rifle bullet than a rope.

The border was more than three hundred miles away, and the intervening country swarmed with Police and militia patrols. Gabriel and Michel Dumas swung far to the south-west, then doubled back, seeking the comparative safety of the wild Cypress Hills country. Word spread by messenger and telegraph that Dumont was running for the border, and the patrols redoubled their vigilance. But men who knew Dumont well were sure he would get away.

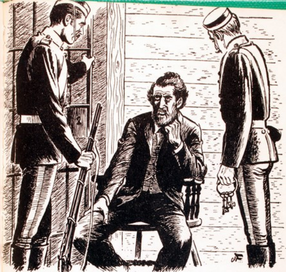
"They'll never catch him," an old Scotch friend said. "He knows the prairies as a sheep knows its heath."

Two weeks after leaving Batoche, Gabriel Dumont crossed the border into Montana.

19. The Trial of Louis Riel

Two days after the fall of Batoche, Louis Riel surrendered to a party of Middleton's scouts. He was shabby and dejected, heart-sick and afraid. Afraid that Middleton's troops might take the law into their own hands and lynch him. But he soon found that he had nothing to fear. Middleton received him with surprising gentleness and courtesy, treating him as an honoured guest rather than a dangerous prisoner of war. The militiamen crowded around Riel's tent, but they had no thought of doing the fallen leader harm. Their attitude towards him was a mixture of curiosity and respect. All they wanted was to be able to tell the folks back home that they had "seen Riel".

What were Riel's thoughts in that dreary time following the downfall of the dominion he had dreamed of establishing in the North-West? No man can tell. But in the dark hours of the night, tossing sleepless on his prison-tent cot, perhaps he wondered in doubt and torment if he were indeed God's prophet. And if so, what had happened? Had God failed him? Or had he failed God? He had led his people to ruin, but he could not believe that his cause was wrong. And if it was right, why had God permitted him to be defeated and destroyed?



For Riel had no illusions about his fate. When, on May 23, 1885, the doors of the cell in the Regina jail closed upon him, he knew that the vision of the gallows on the hill was true.

Meanwhile, mopping-up operations proceeded slowly throughout the North-West. General Strange and the Alberta Field Force (with whom Middleton did not bother to communicate for nearly three weeks) at last ran Big Bear and his Plains Crees to earth near Frenchman's Butte on the North Saskatchewan, a few miles from Fort Pitt.

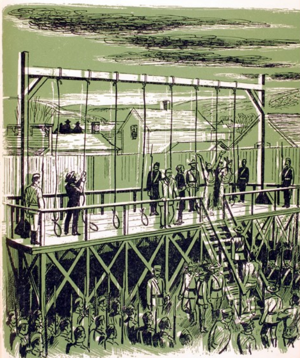
The Crees, fighting skilfully under the command of their great war-chief, Wandering Spirit, managed to hold off the attacking force and escape into the wild, almost impenetrable muskeg country to the north. Middleton, after grumpily accusing Strange of acting without orders in attacking Big Bear, brought some of his own force up to Fort Pitt, and between them the two generals forced the surrender of the rebellious Crees. Wandering Spirit, the man chiefly responsible for the Frog Lake massacre, gave himself up at Fort Pitt. Big Bear, after wandering alone through the woods for several days, surrendered to a police patrol near Fort Carlton. The thirty white prisoners whom the Crees had dragged about with them for nearly two months were released unharmed.

Poundmaker's braves, who after the Battle of Cut Knife had begun to move towards Batoche, slipped quietly back to their reservations when they heard of the defeat of the Métis. Poundmaker and several of his leading men were made prisoners by Middleton.

The militia turned their faces at last towards home. The Mounted Police, chagrined and bitter, resumed their old duties. The Métis returned to their homes and tried to repair the damage done by gun-fire and plunder, and wondered sadly how they could survive the coming winter. They had planted no spring crops, and since they had been disarmed by the Government they had no guns to hunt with.

Throughout the summer of 1885 the mills of justice ground slowly and inexorably. On the whole, the Cana-

dian Government dealt leniently with those who had taken up arms against it. But for some, like the Frog Lake murderers, there was no mercy. Wandering Spirit and seven other braves died on the scaffold at Battleford. Big Bear and Poundmaker were each sentenced to three years in the penitentiary.



The sentence imposed on Poundmaker was one of doubtful justice. Poundmaker had tried hard to control his braves. He acted with great restraint at the Battle of Cut Knife. He had long held out against Riel's urgings to head a full-scale rising of his tribe. The great chief was in the prime of life when he went to prison. He came out a man broken in spirit and body, suffering from tuberculosis. Both he and Big Bear died shortly after their release.

The trial of Louis Riel, accused of high treason against the Government of Canada, opened in Regina on July 28th and lasted nearly a week. No trial in Canadian history has ever excited more interest or stirred up more racial bitterness. The French Canadians naturally tended to show some sympathy for the Métis leader. On the other hand the people of Ontario, remembering the execution of Thomas Scott, clamoured for Riel's blood.

Riel was allowed to speak to the court in his own defence. Those in the crowded little court-room waited tense and expectant as the haggard-faced man in the prisoner's box rose and prepared to speak. A great orator, Riel, a man with the power in him to sway multitudes. So, at least, the spectators in the court-room had heard. And now his very life, perhaps, depended on what he was going to say.

But Riel disappointed his audience. He was worn out; and he had so much to say that his thoughts were confused. He could not order his sentences with the old skill, the old eloquence. And besides, he may have thought, what was the use? They could not understand—the cold-

faced man in the judge's chair, the stolid Englishmen who made up the jury—they could not understand what it meant to hear the voice of God and to feel the compulsion to do what you knew to be God's will.

One thing he tried earnestly to make clear at the outset —he did not want to be saved from the gallows by a plea of insanity.

"Even if I am going to be sentenced by you, gentlemen of the jury," he said, "I have this satisfaction—that if I die I will not be reputed by all men as insane or a lunatic."

He went on to repeat his old arguments about the necessity of protecting the rights and preserving the heritage of the Métis nation against white aggression. He accused the white men—"the pioneers of civilization" he called them with a bitter curl of the lip—of corrupting the Indians. "The one who has the courage to speak out against those evil men," he said—and for just a moment he was the fierce-eyed passionate orator of old—"the one who has the courage to speak out, instead of being an outrageous man becomes in fact a benefactor to those men themselves and to society!"

His voice fell away. He was very tired. Last of all he said, "I put my speech under the protection of my God, my Saviour. He is the only one who can make it effective."

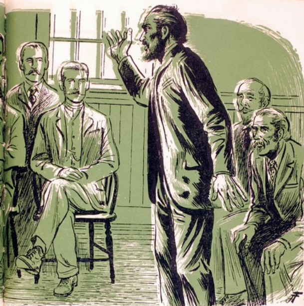
The jury, after deliberating for a little more than an hour, found Louis Riel guilty of high treason. To their verdict, which meant death for Riel, they added a recommendation of mercy.

The presiding magistrate, Mr. Justice Hugh Richardson,

spoke. "Louis Riel," he said, "have you anything to say why the sentence of this court should not be pronounced upon you, for the offence of which you have been found guilty?"

One more chance. A chance to show the world what manner of man he really was. For a little while the old spirit flamed up in the doomed body of the Métis leader.

"In some ways," he said, "I think that to a certain



number of people the verdict against me today is proof that maybe I am a prophet, maybe Riel is a prophet, he suffers enough for it!"

And then he stated in direct and simple words the principle upon which the Métis' claim to a heritage in the West was founded, the principle which denied the white man the right to overrun the territory of another people.

"Who starts the nations?" Riel said. "The very same

one who creates them—God. God is the master of the universe. Our planet is His land, and the nations and tribes are members of His family. As a good father He gives a portion of that land to each nation, each tribe, to be its heritage forever. Now here is the strong Canadian nation which has its inheritance from God. When the people of that nation have overcrowded their country, it does not give them the right to come and take the share of the tribe beside them. This is the principle! God cannot create a tribe without giving it land to live on. We are not birds, we have to walk the ground!"

It was right, he said, that the Métis should fight to hold their heritage, God's gift to their ancestors. In opposing the overrunning of the West by the white men, he himself was doing the will of God.

It was the last flare-up. Riel talked for a while longer, in wavering sentences. But his words did not always make sense, and he exhausted both himself and those who listened to him.

Mr. Justice Richardson leaned forward. When he spoke, he spoke not only for the court, but for most Canadians.

"Louis Riel," he said, his voice flat, tired, "you have been found guilty of high treason. You have been proved to have let loose the floodgates of rapine and bloodshed; you have managed to arouse the Indians; and you have brought ruin and misery to many families. For what you did, the remarks you have made form no excuse whatever. For what you have done the law requires you to answer."

Mr. Justice Richardson paused. Louis Riel wavered on

his feet, from exhaustion, not fear. His deep-sunk eyes betrayed no emotion.

The judge spoke again. "It is now my painful duty to pass the sentence of the court upon you—that on the 18th of September next you will be taken to the place appointed for your execution, and there hanged by the neck until you are dead.

"And may God have mercy on your soul."

20. The End of the Dream

The dreadful sentence passed, Louis Riel was taken back to Regina jail to await the appointed hour of death. And at once the storm broke all across Canada—the storm of protest and counter-protest. Petitions flooded Ottawa, some demanding that Riel be pardoned, others that the sentence of death be carried out. There was wild talk of Quebec's seceding from the Dominion. But through the storm Sir John A. Macdonald, Prime Minister of Canada, remained unshaken. Sir John was convinced of Riel's guilt, and of his sanity. He was determined that there would be no reprieve.

"He shall hang," he shouted, "though every dog in Quebec bark in his favour!"

Appeals—to the Supreme Court of Manitoba, to the Privy Council in England—postponed the date of execution. But they came to nothing. Riel did not greatly care. He had already all but severed his ties with earth. To his aged mother, still living in Manitoba, he wrote: *I am truly resigned and obedient. I am confident that if I surrender my soul to Jesus Christ, peace and happiness will be allowed me.*

He no longer thought of himself as a God-inspired pro-

phet. He confessed his sins and became reconciled to the church of his childhood and his people. Father André, a priest who had known Riel from the Red River days, attended him in the last weeks of his imprisonment.

But one man refused to give up hope. Across the line in Montana, Gabriel Dumont, now a political refugee, worked day and night on a wild plan to snatch Riel away from the gallows. Gabriel loved his cousin Louis with a blind dog-like devotion. He would gladly have died for him. Working with feverish energy among the Métis of Montana he raised money, hired men and horses, and established secret relay stations all the way from Regina to Lewiston, Montana, more than four hundred miles away. But word of Dumont's activities reached the ears of the Mounted Police in Regina, and they redoubled their vigilance. Dumont, half-crazed with grief and despair, was compelled to abandon his plan.

But even today a curious tradition survives among the Métis of Montana that the plan succeeded, and Riel did not die on the gallows.

On his last night on earth Louis Riel talked long and earnestly with Father André. "Do not fear," he said to the sorrowing priest. "I will not shame my friends nor rejoice my enemies by dying like a coward. For fifteen years my enemies have pursued me with their hatred, and never yet have they made me flinch—today still less when they are leading me to the scaffold. I am infinitely grateful to them for delivering me from this harsh captivity."

And a little later he added, in tones of mingled regret and exaltation, "I have my relatives, my wife, my children, my country and my people. The prospect of being free and living with them would have made my heart beat with joy. But the thought of passing my life in an insane asylum

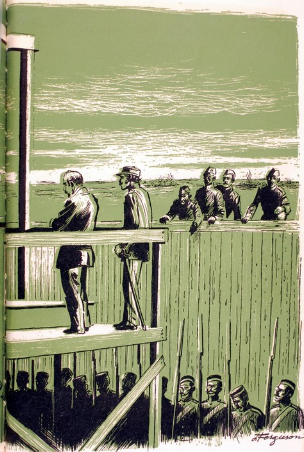
or in a penitentiary, mingling with all the scum of society and obliged to submit to all insults, fills me with horror. I thank God for having spared me this trial, and I accept death with joy and gratitude."

On the morning of November 16th, 1885, Louis Riel walked quietly to the scaffold. On the advice of Father André, who attended him, he did not claim the privilege of making a speech before he died. There is no surer evidence of his new-found humility than this refusal to make a final grand gesture, to speak words which might go ringing down the ages. Instead, he repeated to himself the little prayer he had spoken in Fort Benton the year before, when he was on his way north to lead his people—as he dreamed—into freedom: *My Father, bless me according to the views of Thy Providence, which are beautiful and without measure.*

For the last time he looked out over the plains country, beautiful in the crisp early morning, that he had always loved—the country that was the lost heritage of his people. Then the hangman covered his eyes. He began to repeat the Lord's Prayer. He was halfway through the prayer when the trap-door opened.

Even those who hated Louis Riel most, acknowledged that he died without fear.

The Métis of the old North-West still linger on, a dying people. Many of them live in isolated settlements far north of the original communities along the Saskatchewan. They are dispirited and unhappy, moving uneasily between



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the two worlds of Indian and white man, and unable to adjust to either. These people are the modern representatives of the once-proud and fiercely independent nation of the Métis, a nation defeated not by Middleton's militia but by the relentless pressure of the white man's way of life.

The village of Batoche no longer exists; but the district surrounding the site still bears the old name. The natives of the district, many of them descendants of the Métis who fought so gallantly against the North-West Field Force, are quiet and subdued. Their lives are hard because they are not good farmers, and farming is now the only way of life open to them. Surrounded by people of Canadian and European origin they are an alien group still clinging to many of the customs and folk ways of their ancestors.

On the high ground a mile or so from the river the old church and parish house still stand, hardly changed from 1885, their sideboards showing clearly the marks of bullets fired during the siege of Batoche. In an open field a short distance from the church is the cemetery of the original community. In the cemetery, surrounded by a rotting picket fence, are the graves of nine of the men who died in defence of their homes and way of life.

The cemetery is neglected now. The grass grows long, and weeds and wild flowers cover the graves with a tangle of vegetation. But perhaps the prairie grass and the wild flowers are a more suitable covering than close-shaven lawns and marble headstones for those who lie under the quiet earth.

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Louis Riel was buried in St. Boniface, the place of his birth. The simple headstone above his grave bears only the words: *Riel, 16 novembre, 1885.*

But his story is still remembered by the Métis, and his name still brings a glow to the eyes of those who know him only as a great man in a story, an almost legendary hero who dreamed of preserving the heritage of his people and died trying to make the dream come true.

It is right that Louis Riel should be so remembered. Whatever his faults, whatever his crimes—and they were many—his dream was not ignoble. The cry "We are Métis!" was a cry from the heart. He believed passionately in the nationhood of his people; and for that belief he died.