

MSS

C550/1/28.1.

IV

The Half-Breed Rising on the South Saskatchewan, 1885.

From the point of view of two of the participants, Patrice Fleury and Charles Laviolette, as related to W.E. Cameron, July 29, 1926.

The South Branch Half-Breed<sup>s</sup> had endeavoured to get their representative in the Dominion House, D.H. Macdowall, to secure for them a grant of scrip in extinguishment of their rights in the Northwest as the original inheritors of the country. Mr. Macdowall was in Ottawa attending the session during the winter of 1884-5, but they seemed unable to get any assurance that their claims would receive consideration.

Some of the half-breeds in Manitoba had received scrip in extinguishment of their ~~claims~~ <sup>claims</sup> but after the rebellion of 1870 many who had not been dealt with moved out from Red River and took up lands about Batoche and these had received no scrip either for themselves or for their children.

The agitation had been going on for some time and in the summer of 1884, as is generally known, they had sent three men as delegates to St. Peter's Mission in Montana with a request to Louis Riel that he would come to the Saskatchewan and champion the cause of the half-breeds. The delegates were Gabriel Dumont, Moïse Ouelette and James Isbister. Riel came.

There were frequent meetings during the fall and winter. No revolutionary measures were at first contemplated, but as time passed and they received no definite assurance that their petitions would be regarded, their discontent grew. At length they decided to send an envoy to find out what their member was doing. The man selected was Hon. Laurence Clarke. Mr. Clarke was away for a long time and when he returned in March he was met at Batoche by a large company of half-breeds, including Charles Nolin, Philip Garnot (the latter a French-Canadian) and others, anxious to hear his report. Mr. Macdowall, he said, had spoken in the House in behalf of the children of the Saskatchewan half-breeds but some of the members had opposed any further grant of scrip being made. "Some of them at Ottawa said, according to Mr. Clarke," remarked Laviolette "that if the French and Indian half-breeds raised any row they would get bullets in the head; that was the scrip they would get." The gathering broke up but it was followed by another in a few days.

Said Charles Nolin: "If we can't get scrip for our children we will raise a revolution."

"Yes," Gabriel Dumont declared, "that's what we will have to do."

The following night the half-breeds gathered. They went to Batoche and took Walter and Baker's store. They were half starved. They stayed around for two or three days after this, scouting. Laviolette was working with Wm. Tompkins and the Indian

Department at this time, three miles north of Duck Lake, looking after cattle. Gabriel Dumont and Jonas Moreau came after him and brought him to Batoche, where he was put in the cellar with Billy Tompkins.

Next morning he was brought before the council. Said Riel:

"If you won't take up arms with your nation, we'll turn you over to the Indians to deal with -- let them cut you up or do with you as they please. But if you take up arms, we'll turn you loose to be a soldier with the others." Thus Laviolette agreed to join the movement.

Next day leaders were selected. Ambroise Champagne was the first appointed---Captain of ~~the~~ scouts. He was allowed to choose ten men as his command; they had to be brave men and good riders. Among those he selected was Laviolette. Patrice Fleury was next selected; he was named second captain of scouts, to patrol west of the river, Champagne having the east side. Fleury also chose ten men. Then troop captains were chosen, the captains of the fighting companies. There were nine or ten of these. Gabriel Dumont was commander-in-chief---the general. There was also a Board of Strategy headed by two more generals---Charles Nolin and Louis Riel. Other members of the Board were: John Boucher, Philip Gardipui, Pierre Gardipui, Old Man Parenteau (father-in-law of Xavier Batoche), Moise Ouellette, Maxime Lepine, Joseph Arcand, Napoleon Nault (brother of Andre Nault) and Albert Monkman. William Jackson was the first secretary; after he went crazy, Philip Garnot replaced him.

From Batoche the rebels moved to Duck Lake and occupied Stobart, Eden and Company's store. Scouting details were constantly on the roads east and west toward Carlton and Humbolt. They killed cattle regardless of ownership wherever they came upon any, being short of food. Harry Ross and John W. Astley while scouting from Carlton one night were captured near Duck Lake and made prisoners. Gabriel Dumont, Baptiste Dishon and a third man made this arrest. ~~An~~ Indian Agent, J.B. Lash and Peter Tompkins were also made prisoners, Fleury and Laviolette could not recall when or where.

The next thing the rebels heard was that the police were coming. The scouts reported them advancing from Carlton with Thomas McKay in the lead. Fleury immediately seized a horse, mounted without a saddle and rode away to meet the troops. Gabriel Dumont, Riel and others tried to stop him, calling, ~~Patrice~~, "Hold on! Wait!" but Fleury paid them no attention. He went on alone and met the troops.

Reaching the <sup>Indian</sup> reserve he encountered two Mounted Police scouts. They asked him where he was bound. "I am going to see Tom McKay," he replied, after learning from them that McKay was with the party. The scouts wheeled and galloped back ahead of Patrice. ~~At~~ A mile farther on he met McKay on horseback at the head of a number of sleighs containing several men each. Said McKay:

"Well, Patrice, I never expected to see you in an affair like this."

Patrice: "Well, you see me." They shook hands. "I am not looking for trouble. Where are you going?"

McKay: "I am going to Henry Kelly's for oats."

Patrice: "You won't be able to go. You won't reach there. It will be better for you if you turn here. If you don't, although there are a good many of you, you are likely all to be arrested."

McKay: "Who's going to stop us--who can stop us?"

Patrice looked round. Behind him at the point where he had met the two scouts the half-breeds from Duck Lake were coming at a furious gallop. "Tom," said Patrice, "look! There are the men who will stop you."

There were about thirty rebels in the approaching company. Gabriel Dumont, James Short, Edouard Dumont and another were in the lead; behind, the whole half-breed cavalry. Said McKay: "Patrice, go and meet them; don't let them come too close. We'll talk a little."

Patrice went toward them. "Stop, Gabriel, stop a moment!" The leaders halted at a distance of about ten yards. The others crowded up behind them. Said McKay:

"Gabriel, can't we speak to one another before starting any trouble?"

James Short: "Tom, what are you going to talk about? You're forever trying to damage your own people the half-breeds."

Gabriel rode up to McKay. "What's the use of talking? I know what you are after. When I meet Tom McKay, I don't meet him with any friendly feeling."

Gabriel threw up his gun. As he raised it, Patrice thinks, the trigger caught on his belt and the gun was discharged in the air. Patrice had lifted his hand ~~and struck up Gabriel's~~ ~~gun~~ ~~and~~ and he shouted to the half-breeds: "Don't shoot first!"

McKay: "That's right; don't shoot first!"

The parties to the parley stood between the two opposing companies, loyalists and rebels. The soldiers in the sleighs now turned and whipped their horses and McKay went with them. The half-breeds stood watching them.

Fleury jumped off his horse and running to the rear police sleigh, jumped on and rode for some distance.

"My reason for this was that I dreaded some hot-headed fool would begin shooting and start trouble, but I knew they would not shoot while I was on the sleigh," <sup>Patrice explained.</sup> "there were six or eight sleighs and about fifty men in all."

After riding some way, Patrice ~~jumped~~ <sup>dropped</sup> off and started back afoot. James Short met him with his horse. The half-breeds returned together to Duck Lake for dinner. While they were eating, scouts arrived hurriedly.

"Now, here come the Police!" they announced.

The rebels mounted instantly and rode out to meet the troops. Fleury wished to go but Riel ordered him to remain.

"You guard the prisoners," he said. "Some of these people don't look at them any too kindly." ."

Joe McKay, the interpreter, was a couple of hundred yards ahead of the troops. A half-blind old Indian named Asseweeyin

(Crow Fat) met him on foot. McKay had a rifle in his hand and a revolver in his belt. The Indian had no weapon.

"Where are you going, grandchild?" said Asseeweeyin. "You've got too many guns. Better give me one."

He put his hand on the revolver to pull it off and McKay raising his rifle fired. The bullet hit Asseeweeyin in the stomach. Then McKay turned and ran back to meet the troop which was coming at about a hundred yards away and the fight was on.

Laviolette was in this fight. He was near Trottier's when it began. It was a bad fight while it lasted, which according to these half-breeds was only ten or fifteen minutes. The police turned and retreated, leaving behind them on the field nine men dead and one wounded--Charles Newitt. Four men were killed on the rebel side--Eustache Laframboise, Isidore Dumont (brother of Gabriel), Jean Baptiste Montour and Joseph Montour. Their wounded were Gabriel Dumont, Jean Baptiste Parenteau, Sheesheep Gardipui and one Fiddler.

As the Police retired Laviolette ran up from the vicinity of Sandy Thomas' house to the hollow north of the road in which most of the half-breeds had fought. Gabriel was staggering and stumbling toward him and fell, snatching at him as he went down.

"What's the matter, uncle?" asked Laviolette.

"They hit me a little," said the rebel chief. "It's nothing."

A bullet had ploughed along his scalp for about three inches and his face was covered with blood. Laviolette ran up the hill. Two police teams stood there, one dying, the other uninjured.

Under the fence near by lay the wounded volunteer, Newitt. Philip Gardipui was striking him on the head with the back of a sword left by the troops, which he had picked up on the field. Riel stood beside him. He was attempting to protect Newitt--- trying to push Gardepui aside. He called to Laviolette:

"Take care of this wounded man! Don't let any Indian kill him."

Patrice Fleury came with a team and picked up the four dead half-breeds . With the aid of Laviolette he placed Newitt on the bodies and drove off. Laviolette stood in the sleigh holding Newitt's head against his breast and his legs under him so that the others could not shoot or harm the prisoner. An Indian ran up and struck Laviolette a stinging blow over the shoulders with his whip. The savage wished to kill Newitt and was venting his rage on Laviolette for protecting him. Edouard Lafr<sup>am</sup>boise came and wished to kill Newitt also; he was the son of the dead half-breed, Eustache Lafr<sup>am</sup>boise. Sheesheep, who had been wounded, was another would-be murderer; he came up and shot at Newitt as he rested against Laviolette, but William Swan struck up the half-breed's rifle with his own gun and the shot went wild. Then Manuel Champagne came and helped Laviolette, by Riel's orders, to carry the wounded man upstairs to the council room over Stobart's store, where he was safe from any potential assassin.

Asseeweeyin lived until near morning of the day following the Duck Lake fight and before he died told the half-breeds the story of his encounter with Joe McKay as embodied in this narrative.