

THE WEEK:

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TOPICS OF THE WEEK.

BEFORE THE WEEK is in the hands of the reader, General Middleton, who marched from Clarke's to Batoche's Crossing of the South Saskatchewan with a column on each side of the river, will be face to face with the rebels. He expected to attack Riel's position yesterday, and so far as can be judged at this distance from the seat of action, the General's plans have been so carefully laid that the rebel chief will require more strength than he is supposed to command if he is to make any serious stand against the troops. The woods here afford the kind of shelter which the Half-breeds would naturally seek. General Middleton could shell them and send in a rattling fire from the Gatling gun. The number of the Half-breeds with Riel has recently been put by one who has been in the camp as low as two hundred, and of Indian allies there were but few. Meanwhile, Colonel Otter is marching to the relief of Battleford, where he may arrive by Monday. Fort Pitt has been found wrecked and two policemen are reported killed. The fate of the rest of the garrison and the refugees who were in the fort is, as we write, uncertain; but the absence of a large number of dead bodies negatives the theory of a general massacre. If they started for Battleford they would be in great danger from the hostile Crees. On the other hand, it is possible that Inspector Dickens may have been detained by the lowness of the river, and would, in that case, probably have intrenched himself and his band on the north bank. Should a large number of Indians have joined in the attack on Fort Pitt, serious future trouble with the tribe is probable. The Blackfeet are preparing to defend themselves if attacked by the Crees.

Who fired the first shot at Duck Lake is a question which we need scarcely trouble ourselves to discuss. It is admitted that before the Mounted Police reached that point Riel and the Half-breeds were in insurrection; and the only conceivable object of two hundred armed men placing themselves on either side of the trail along which the Police had to pass was to attack them at the point where a blow could be struck with the greatest chance of success. Riel complains that force is sent to oppose force, as if insurrection had a patent right of immunity. The statements of persons in a position to know make it certain that many were coerced to join the rebel ranks and prevented from leaving. When Riel had staked his own life on a hair-brained venture he became anxious to sell it as dearly as possible. He could hardly have counted on a general rising of the Indians, and it could not have been long before he became convinced that failure and disaster awaited his movement. Nothing could be more natural than the restlessness of the Indian tribes, of which reports reach us from time to time. There is not on earth a being more anxious than the North American Indian to learn the news of everything which even remotely concerns himself. And there is no doubt that all sorts of false statements have been made to him, coupled with alluring promises of unlimited plunder as the reward of taking part in the rising. But the Indians, as a rule, had sagacity to know that this advice was interested, and that, if they allowed it to move them to action, a day of reckoning would come. The massacre at Frog Lake was an episode which shows the sympathy of a certain number of the Crees with the Half-breeds. The Crees were the Indians with whom the French wanderers in the wilds of the North-West—North-West Company employes, Hudson's Bay Company employes and free traders—in previous times came most directly in contact, and most of these Half-breeds had French fathers and Cree mothers. Between the other tribes and the rebel Half-breeds there are no such ties of consanguinity. The modern Crees are among the least warlike of the tribes; the presumption is that strong efforts were made by the Half-breeds to seduce them from their allegiance, and, if so, they have had only very partial success.

THERE can be no doubt as to the source or as to the object of the attempt to throw the responsibility for the fatal affray at Duck Lake on Major Crozier and his men, instead of allowing it to rest on Riel. The attempt is wholly futile. In the case of an unarmed mob a commanding officer is bound to exercise the utmost forbearance; and the utmost forbearance generally has been exercised by British officers and soldiers, even under the most galling provocation. But, when troops are confronted by armed insurgents, though the commanding officer is still bound to avoid unnecessary bloodshed, he is at liberty, as soon as he thinks it necessary, to give the order to fire. He need not wait to be fired upon; refusal, verbal or practical, on the part of the insurgents to surrender or disperse is warrant enough. Even if his order may be deemed to have been premature, and he may be open to blame on that account, the responsibility for the bloodshed which may ensue will still rest with undiminished weight upon those who have taken up arms against the law. Riel, therefore, is guilty of the blood shed at Duck Lake. He is also guilty of the blood shed by the Indians, whom he has incited to revolt, whose murderous propensities he well knew, and whose atrocious acts he must have foreseen. Therefore, if he has any political friends who wish again to preserve his life, in order that he may hereafter be the leader of a third rebellion, they will have to resort to the same expedient as before, and once more privately facilitate his escape from justice. If he is brought to the bar there will be no plea which can possibly avail him. The question who fired first at Duck Lake will be totally irrelevant to the issue. To complete the case, Riel has had no personal grievance to justify or excuse him in taking arms. He is not one of those the settlement of whose land claims has been delayed by the Ottawa Government, and who, it is to be feared, have some ground for exasperation on that account. Having been allowed to escape the doom which justice awarded him for a foul murder, he has been living in the United States, and he has come over to our side of the line moved only by his malignant ambition to stir up a rebellion which is filling our fields with havoc and our homesteads with torture and blood.