

Louis Riel's Parting of the Ways.

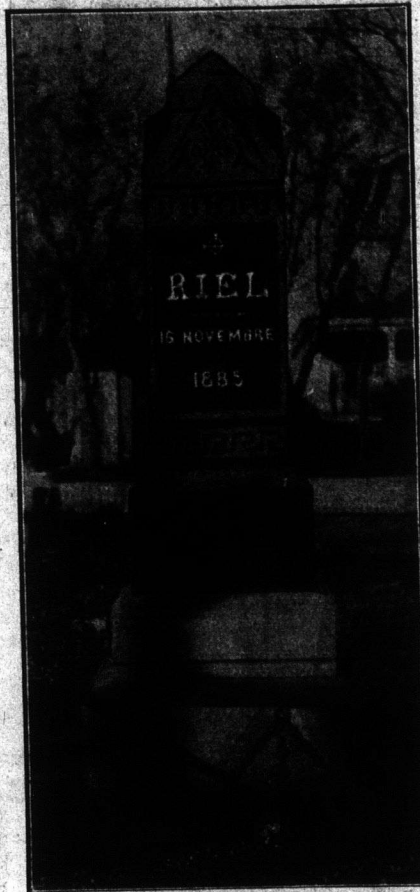
By John Richardson. Specially Written for the Western Home Monthly.

I STOOD beside the grave in St. Boniface Churchyard of Louis Riel, of the Red River Rebellion fame, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his execution. Only a cold, grey stone marked his resting-place. There was not a soul throughout Canada who thought enough of Riel to place a flower on his grave, and if you walk through the churchyard on November 16th, the day he was hanged, you will see a stone with these words: "Here lies Louis Riel"—and no more.

Last month I was in the middle of an enthusiastic crowd that greeted Lord Strathcona on a visit to Montreal. And thereby hangs a tale.

Have you ever reflected that at one time Louis Riel was "at the parting of the ways"—a phrase made memorable in Canadian history by the President of a neighboring Republic. Riel's guidepost once pointed to honor and fame, but he took the road that led to the gallows. But for that wrong turning, he might have been a second Lord Strathcona—the man he tried to mar, but helped to make.

In the early eighties there was little to choose between Donald Smith, the sturdy and hardy immigrant from Scotland, and Louis Riel, the famous half breed of French extraction. Riel had been schooled in the atmosphere of a university. Smith had received his learning in the school that has turned out more good pupils than any other—the World's School of Experience! While Riel was studying languages, Donald Smith was studying humanity



A silent sentinel that tells a tragedy. Thousands of people pass this grave stone and are blind to its significance.

—or rather that portion of humanity which had thrown open the hitherto bolted door and entered the lonely North. Both were good men, but Riel

switched his train into the wrong siding, and he met with the disaster which is the lot of all human locomotives that leave the track in the way he did. The way it turned out is part of Canadian history, but the human side of it will bear telling here.

In 1869 Riel roused the half breeds of the Red River Settlement to rebellion. Governor McDougall was forced out of Fort Garry, and, setting up a dictatorship of his own, in defiance of the late Queen Victoria, Riel tore down the Union Jack, and unfurled an ensign of his own making. In Montreal, nearly 2,000 miles away, Smith, who had risen from the bottom to the top of the ladder in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company, saw that British prestige was at stake. He set out for Fort Garry without a moment's notice.

There was no Canadian-Pacific Railway to take him to the seat of the trouble in two days. He had to drive in a sleigh—mind you, more than twice the distance from London, England, to Berlin, Germany—and the winters we have now are milder than those of former days. For his pains the Rebel Chief promptly put him in prison.

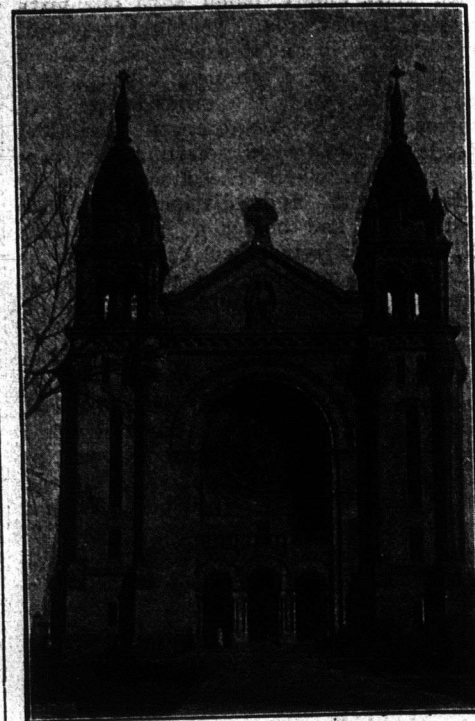
A Picture of Riel.

I like the description Lord Strathcona gives to his friends in London, when they chat about the rebellion. "A small, stout man, with a large head, a sallow, puffy face, a sharp intelligent eye, a square cut, massive forehead, overhung with a mass of long, clustering hair, and marked by well-cut eyebrows—altogether a remarkable face." This is the mirror in which you get a glimpse of the rebel.

There were a few Scotchmen among Riel's followers, and they didn't like a fellow-countryman being kept within four damp walls. They told Riel how they felt about it. Even then, Scotchmen were fond of public meetings to air grievances, as they are to-day, and they erected a temporary platform. "This," they told Riel, "is the place for you and Smith to thrash the matter

out." Riel didn't like it, but he agreed. To Smith, anything was better than lying in jail.

It was a memorable meeting. When Riel stepped on the platform, the French and half-breeds cheered. Some of the Scotch and English settlers joined in, perhaps through policy. They did not know what to make of Riel. Some openly admired him; a few were afraid. The greeting Smith got was as cold as the atmosphere freezing the men's beards as they looked on.



St. Boniface Cathedral in whose churchyard the remains of Riel lie buried.

When Lord Strathcona speaks to-day, the world listens. But that day at Fort Garry he made the most important speech of his life. In a sense, half a continent depended upon his single effort. History will for ever record that he acquitted himself well.

There was a dramatic moment when

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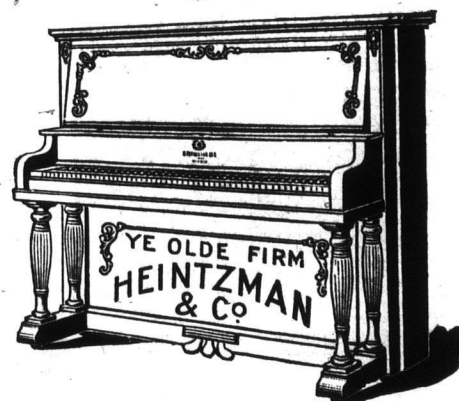
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