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# THE RIEL REBELLION

## 1885

FIRST EDITION.

"WITNESS" PRINTING HOUSE, MONTREAL.

TWENTY-FIVE CENTS.

### PREFACE.

No volcanic eruption ever broke out more unexpectedly than the rebellion in the North-West. There were not wanting warnings, but those they reached looked upon them as the outcome of fear or partizanship. Whatever their grievancés or distress, it could not be imagined that a few poor half-breeds would raise a standard against British power. After the outbreak, serious events followed each other rapidly. Interest in what was impending always left little thought for realizing what had happened. Descriptions by mail of what was a fortnight past tumbled in on the heels of the telegrams of yesterday. Now that the rebellion is over, an orderly knowledge of the events in their sequence and relations will be desired by everyone. In this work, care has been taken to preserve only the romance of truth, discarding apocryphal embellishments. Substantial accuracy can be vouched for, although some details will probably require correction from sources not yet available.

### CHAPTER I.

#### VIVE LA NATION MÉTISSE.

On the 17th of March, 1885, a rumor, designedly started, ran through the half-breed settlements scattered around the little church of St. Laurent, on the right bank of the South Saskatchewan river, that the "police" were crossing to suppress "La Nation Métisse," and to seize its political and religious leader Louis David Riel. There was a hurried gathering, of which the few prominent and active men of the little community who were on hand, evidently not surprised, formed the greater part. There and then "The Metis Nation" was declared to be established, the authority of the Provisional Government of the Saskatchewan was proclaimed, and both were to be maintained, if necessary, by force of arms. Runners were sent to arouse the half-breeds and to secure the alliance of the Indians, and Louis Riel, who had just been elected President, is reported to have said "The Rebellion is a fact."

Louis Riel, the President, is inclined to revolution by birth as well as by character. He is said to be descended from a dashing young Irishman, possibly an O'Reilly, who came to Canada about the beginning of last century. His father, Jean Baptiste Riel (pronounced Re-alle), who had but a dash of Indian blood in his veins, headed an outbreak, in 1849, against the Hudson's Bay Company in the North-West, rescued a prisoner and became so powerful that the Honorable Company felt compelled to purchase his favor. The means thus obtained brought increasing



Photo, Zimmerman, St. Paul.—Eng. Harper Bros.

*Louis Riel.*

[Facsimile of signature to Parliament roll.]

consideration, which culminated in young Louis being sent to be educated at St. Mary's, commonly called the Jesuit's College, in Montreal, for the priesthood. That this institution had but crude material to work on in the young barbarian may be judged from the following preserved specimens of his early business correspondence:—

March 11, 1885.

White Horse Brand  
My dear Sir I sent to  
you the Silver Fox..... \$6  
and 10 minks..... 27.16  
and two Hothers..... 1.25  
110 lbs Flincoln..... 1.9.94  
I am your serv  
La RIEL.

buy Mr. frises son  
My dear Sir if it is possible to put his Horse  
inn will mouch blagé you".  
"Préris du Cheval Blanc  
Monsieur, Je vous avois par le garçon de  
Ma Frises 18 pair de souillier a 21.15  
Monsieur j'ai trouvés des torren mais j'ataut pour  
la gens aîn de refaires le torren vous pouvez  
envoyer lar gane par exavier frises.  
Je suis votre serviteur  
La RIEL  
le 9 decembre 1885."

He was a relative and protégé of H. race Archbishop Taché, of St. Boniface, who was destined to be his protector in manhood as in boyhood. He did not enter the priesthood, but studied law without much success in the office of the Hon. Mr. Lafamme, and eventually returned to the North-West, a rather moody youth, of a melancholy turn of mind, full of Byronic megrims about being uncomprehended, but with religious tendencies as a result of his training. He had made little impression upon his associates, and it was with wonder they heard, in 1869, that he was the leader of the rebellious half-breeds of the Red River valley.

His claim at that time, and that of the small native population whom he led, was that they were not in rebellion, but were, as the natural owners of the land, bound to resist invasion from a government which had taken over their territory in pursuance of an agreement with a trading company, to which their consent was not asked and in which their rights of property and of self