

NARRATIVE OF OCCURRENCES

IN

TORONTO, UPPER CANADA, IN DEC., 1837.

[THE following valuable and interesting narrative was written by Col. James Fitz Gibbon, the hero of Beaver Dams, within a few days after the occurrence of the events recorded therein, and while they were still fresh in the writer's memory. Some years afterwards the gallant Colonel prepared and published a small pamphlet, giving a more extended account of those events, but the pamphlet has long been out of print, and is very rarely met with. The earlier narrative, moreover, enters into certain little minute details which are not included in the subsequent one, and has therefore a value of its own. Through the courtesy of surviving members of Col. Fitz Gibbon's family, the editor of this paper was enabled to make several extracts from the following narrative when preparing his *Story of the Upper Canadian Rebellion* last year, but the narrative has never before been published *in extenso*, and will doubtless be read with vivid interest by those who still remember the stirring days of '37.]

When Sir Francis Head was asked by His Excellency Sir John Colborne how many Troops he could spare from Upper Canada, he answered, *All*.

All were accordingly sent in October, except the Detachment from Penetanguishene. On its approach to Toronto, I ventured to advise His Excellency to detain it here*—but he said he would not keep a Soldier in the Province: that he would throw the entire care of the Province upon the Loyalists, and if they were not able and willing to defend themselves, the sooner the Province was given up the better.

Before the last Division left Toronto for Lower Canada, the Rebels assembled for training in many parts of the Home District, and no notice was taken of them by the Government. I thought they made these displays to prevent all the Troops from being sent below, that the Rebels there might be so far relieved from the pressure of so many as should be kept here. I did not then think that any considerable portion of the disaffected in Upper Canada would peril their all on the risk of Rebellion. But as November advanced I became day by day more impressed with an apprehension that the peace of the Province would be disturbed. Six thousand stand of Arms were ordered from Kingston, and His Excellency delivered them to the safe keeping of the Civil authorities of the City, and they were deposited in the Market Buildings. His Excellency told

* To account for my offering advice to His Excellency, I beg leave to state that he usually walked for exercise every morning after 8 o'clock to the Government wharf. Over part of this route lay my way to my own office, and I frequently met him. On these occasions he often entered into conversation with me on the state of the Province, and finding my opinions as to approaching danger so very different from his own, so earnestly entertained, and expressed with constantly increasing apprehension, I did think that he argued as if determined to convert me to his opinions. But from day to day I had closely observed the management of the affairs of this Province since the return of Lieut. Gov. Gore to it in 1815, and he laid the foundation of our troubles. So early as the year 1824 there was reason to apprehend a rebellion. Having then one daughter and four sons, infants, I often mentally prayed to the Almighty that it may not break out until my youngest son became 16 years of age, so that my boys may stand by me in the field with arms in their hands. On the 7th. December, 1837, the two youngest were with me on horseback, the youngest 16-years and 8 months old, and the other 18 years.

me that he preferred putting them into the care of the Civil authorities rather than the Militia, that the disaffected should not have cause to say that he intended them to be used in the work of coercion. Volunteers mounted Guard over them every night for three or four nights, when His Excellency directed that no further guard should be kept, as he apprehended no danger whatever—and said to me that he was much inclined to have them brought to the Government House and placed under the charge of his own domestics, and would do so but that he did not like to alter the arrangement he had made, so confident was he that no attempt would be made to disturb the peace of the Province. The Volunteer Guard was, in consequence, dismissed from the City Hall. The Order to this effect I received from His Excellency and delivered to the Volunteers.

During the week ending with November and beginning with December I took the liberty of urging His Excellency to have some preparation made for resistance should an insurrection break out, for that the facts day by day made known to me impressed me strongly with the necessity of being on our guard—but he uniformly resisted every suggestion for openly preparing ourselves.

Unwilling to leave myself and my neighbours entirely at the mercy of contingent dangers I made a list of the persons and their sons living West of Yonge Street, in the City, upon whose loyalty I thought I could depend, and I proposed to His Excellency to let me warn them to be ready every night before retiring to bed, by having their arms loaded, and their clothes ready to dress quickly and run to the Parliament House on the ringing of the College Bell: and also to permit me to Counsel the Mayor and corporation with their neighbours to be in a like state of preparation in the City East of Yonge Street, and on alarm to assemble at the City Hall. The College Bell and City Bells to be used to give the alarm; I undertaking to have the College Bell rung to give the first alarm. His Excellency permitted me to do this, and it was in part performed by me West of Yonge Street, before the outbreak; but the Mayor neither gave warning nor had any one to ring the church Bells, and I lost half an hour of the most valuable time on the night of the outbreak before I could have those Bells set a ringing.

On Saturday the 2nd December I received such information from Markham and places to the North as to convince me that not a moment should be lost in taking measures of defence, and I went instantly to the Government House. While on my way I met the President of the Bank of Upper Canada and I urged him to take immediate steps for the defence of the Bank. On arriving at the Government House, I found assembled with His Excellency, the Chief Justice, Messrs. Allan and Sullivan of the Executive Council, the Attorney-General and Solicitor-General, Mr. Justice Jones and the Speaker of the Assembly.

I reported the information I had received and the name of the principal person, a Magistrate, from whom I had received part of the information. Little weight was attached to it, and the gentleman in question was sent for, and in an adjoining room examined by His Excellency and the Attorney-General, who soon returned, and the Attorney-General declared that what they heard did not at all amount to what I had stated. Mr. Allan of those present alone concurred in my opinions, and he strongly supported them, as for example:—When the Attorney-General returned he said, "Why, the information brought by this Magistrate is at third or fourth hand, and does not at all make the same impression as what Col. Fitz Gibbon said." I answered, "Not at fourth hand, Sir, but what impression has it made on Mr. L's own mind?" Mr. Allan said,