

nation is exceedingly futile. From what we know of Louis Riel, he does not appear to be one of those extraordinary men, who can command general sway over their fellow countrymen. And there is no man in the world, whatever his power may be, who could take men from a state of peace and bring them into war, simply by his influence, unless there were deep-seated and long-felt feelings of grievances. The hon. gentleman compared Louis Riel to the Mahdi. We know little about the Mahdi. But we do know this: That the people of the Soudan who were brought into rebellion had been suffering for years and years from most despotic rule. They had been for years ground by excessive taxation, and the Mahdi brought them into rebellion, by promising to relieve them from the state of suffering in which they were then placed. I can illustrate what I am now saying, that no man however powerful, can exercise such influence as is attributed to Louis Riel, by a page from our own history. Few men have there been anywhere who have wielded greater sway over his fellow-countrymen than did Mr. Papineau at a certain time in the history of Lower Canada, and no man ever lived who had been more profusely endorsed by nature to be the idol of a nation. A man of commanding presence, of majestic countenance, of impassioned eloquence, of unblemished character, of pure disinterested patriotism, for years and years he held over the hearts of his fellow countrymen almost unbounded sway, and even to this day the mention of his name will arouse throughout the length and breadth of Lower Canada, a thrill of enthusiasm in the breasts of all, men or women old or young. What was the secret of that great power he held at one time? Was it simply his eloquence, his commanding intellect, or even his pure patriotism? No doubt, they all contributed; but the main cause of his authority over his fellow-countrymen was this, that at that time, his fellow countrymen were an oppressed race, and he was the champion of their cause. But when the day of relief came, the influence of Mr. Papineau, however great it might have been and however great it still remained, ceased to be paramount. When eventually the Union Act was carried, Papineau violently assaulted it, showed all its defects, deficiencies and dangers, and yet he could not raise his followers and the people to agitate for the repeal of that Act. What was the reason? The conditions were no more the same. Imperfect as was the Union Act it still gave a measure of freedom and justice to the people, and men who at the mere sound of Mr. Papineau's voice would have gladly courted death on battle fields or scaffold, then stood silent and irresponsible, though he asked them nothing more than a constitutional agitation for a repeal of the Union Act. Conditions were no more the same; tyranny and oppression had made rebels of the people of Lower Canada, while justice and freedom made them true and loyal subjects, which they have been ever since. And now to tell us that Louis Riel, simply by his influence, could bring these men from peace to war; to tell us that they had no grievances; to tell us that they were brought into a state of rebellion either through pure malice or through imbecile adherence to an adventurer, is an insult to the intelligence of the people at large, and an unjust aspersion on the people of the Saskatchewan. The hon. gentleman tells us that the people of the Saskatchewan river have no wrongs, this is but a continuation of the system which has been followed all along with regard to these people. They have been denied their just rights, and now they are slandered by the same men whose unjust course towards them drove them to the unfortunate proceedings they have adopted since. This I do charge upon the Government: that they have for years and years ignored the just claims of the half breeds of the Saskatchewan, that for years and years, these people have been petitioning the Government and always in vain. I say they have been treated by this Government with an indifference amounting to undisguised contempt, that they have been goaded into the unfortunate course they have adopted, and

if this rebellion be a crime, I say the responsibility for that crime weighs as much upon the men who, by their conduct, have caused the rebellion, as upon those who engaged in it. The right hon. gentleman said yesterday that the leader of the opposition had prepared a brief for the lawyers of Louis Riel.

Some hon. MEMBERS. Hear, hear; that is true.

Mr. LAURIER. They say now it is true. I say this, that if the conduct of the Government is part of the defence of Louis Riel, then the Government must take the consequences. It will not do for them to say: You must not attack us, because by attacking us you will save Louis Riel. The Government have put Louis Riel on his trial for life and death, and I suppose it is not his blood they are looking for. I suppose, if they are looking to anything, they are looking to nothing but substantial British justice, and if, in the facts brought out yesterday by my hon. friend, there is something which would go in favor of the defence of Louis Riel, then Louis Riel has the full right to that part of his defence. I say more. I repeat that I do not believe that the men who to-day have put Louis Riel on his trial for his life and death do not desire his blood, that they are only looking for justice; and if justice requires that in the numerous papers which have been suppressed, which have not been brought down to this House, there is anything which can go in favor of Louis Riel's defence, it is their duty to bring them down, and if they were concealing anything which could serve for the defence of Louis Riel, I would charge them with helping to his murder, if he were tried in the absence of such portion of his defence. It will not do for the hon. gentleman to attempt to rouse the prejudices of the masses with respect to this matter. There are prejudices in this country of many kinds. We are not yet so built up as a nation as to forget our respective origins, and I say frankly that the people of my own Province, who have a community of origin with the insurgents, sympathise with them, just as the sympathies of the people of Ontario who are of a different origin would go altogether in the other direction.

Some hon. MEMBERS. No, sir.

Mr. LAURIER. No? Why is it then that it was repeated yesterday, that it is repeated to-day in the press, that it will be asserted and repeated to-morrow, and again and again, that my hon. friend, the leader of the Opposition, has prepared a brief for the lawyers of Louis Riel. Why, Sir, that is appealing to the worst kind and the lowest prejudices of the masses. It is said, and truly said, in your language, Sir, that blood is thicker than water. I am of French origin, and I confess that if I were to act only from the blood which runs in my veins, it would carry me strongly in favor of these people; but above all, I claim to be in favor of what is just and right and fair, to be in favor of justice to every man, and I say, let justice be done, and let the consequences fall upon the guilty ones, whether on the head of Louis Riel, or on the shoulders of the Government. Sir, the Government are all the more unjustifiable in their conduct, that the experience of the past ought to have made them more cautious. It is an ominous fact that, although this young Confederation has existed only eighteen years, it has already been assailed twice by armed rebellion. Of the first rebellion we now know the causes. Light has been let upon that subject. What was the cause of the first rebellion on the Red River in 1869 and 1870? The cause as we now know, is, that the Government—this Government, the men who are in power now, and who were in power then—attempted to take possession of the country without any regard to the rights of the people as a whole, whilst they invaded the rights of the people as individuals. It may be conceived that these people, who had been accustomed to the wild liberty of the prairie, who had been accustomed for generations and generations to rove all over the whole continent, who looked