

BRIEF NARRATIVE OF THE Late Rebellion.

in Lower Canada in November 1838

Before proceeding to narrate the important events which have taken place in this Province since the beginning of November, it may not be amiss briefly to touch upon its political condition, and to consider some of the causes which occasioned the revolt.

When the Earl of Durham assumed the Government in June last, partial tranquillity had succeeded the troublesome events of the winter, though the inhabitants on the frontier of the United States still continued to be kept in dread of an invasion from the French refugees, aided by piratical Americans.

All parties in this province were disposed to confide in His Excellency the Governor General, as one who would administer an effectual salvo to the various political grievances of which they complained. One of the first subjects of enquiry by His Excellency on His arrival, was, whether the many political prisoners, who were in custody had been brought to trial, and being answered in the negative, he not long after issued a Proclamation, by which most of the traitors were unconditionally pardoned. A few of the prime movers and actors of the rebellion were banished the colony, during His Excellency's pleasure. How long this exile continued we too well know, for they are now again employed with equal ardour as before in attempting to subvert that government whose impolitic and unjust leniency alone invested them with the power of again seeking its overthrow.

Whether or not the blame of this rests with Lord Durham, is difficult to be said—he might have been convinced of the inutility of trying them by a jury constituted of their own countrymen; or, he might have received instructions from home, in regard to the course which he was to follow. But why was Martial law discontinued by his predecessor? Like restrictions and commands were probably imposed on him. To whom then are we to ascribe our evils, but to the ignorant and truckling Cabinet at home.

It is however to be hoped, that before the Ministry shall have it in their power again to interfere, such ample justice will be awarded to the miscreants in gaol, as will effectually prevent the recurrence of what we now proceed briefly to detail.

The first intelligence of the actual commencement of hostilities on the part of the rebels, reached this city on the morning of Sunday, November 4th. For some time it was impossible to obtain any information that could be relied upon, so numerous and contradictory were the reports which continued to pour in upon the city. It was, however, soon discovered, that a simultaneous movement of the disaffected had taken place to the south of the St. Lawrence, from the Province line at Lake Champlain, down to Sorel. Intelligence was likewise brought, that the insurgents had taken the steamboat Brougham, with the mail and passengers from Upper Canada, and that all the loyal inhabitants of Beauharnois were prisoners there, at which same place the Brougham and passengers were detained. Among the prisoners were, Mr. Ellice, lady, and sister, Messrs. Brown, Norval, M'Donald, Ross, Houndlow, Lister, D.A.C.G., Parker, R.A., Dr. Campbell, Dr. McIntire, besides several ladies.

By the arrival of the Princess Victoria steamer, from Laprairie, certain intelligence was brought that the rebels were in great force at L'Acadie, and that the Loyal inhabitants had been obliged to flee for their lives. About the same time, intelligence arrived, that an armed body of Canadians had approached the Indian village of Caughnawaga, whilst the inhabitants were at church, with the intention of making them prisoners, provided they could not be gained over to their party. The Chief, being quietly informed that they were lurking near the village, called together his tribe and ordered every one to repair to his house, but to be ready at a given signal, with what arms he could procure. Giving the War-Whoop, they accordingly surrounded the insurgents, and succeeded in taking sixty-four of them prisoners. Their arrival in town excited an interest which was but ill repaid by the miserable appearance of the captives.

A considerable body of troops was the same day despatched to L'Acadie, forming but the first division of the large force which followed. Martial Law was likewise declared, and many suspected persons, were arrested and lodged in gaol; in the number were L. M. Viger, President of the People's

Bank, D. B. Viger, an ex-legislative councillor, Charles Mondelet, John Donegani, and C. S. Cherrier.

Great apprehensions were entertained that an attempt would be made by the disaffected within the city, to obtain possession of it, especially as it was reported (though as it afterwards proved without foundation,) that a combined attack would be made from the North and West sections of the country. The most active and vigorous preparations existed on the part of the Volunteers to expel the enemy, should the anticipated attack take place, and in the space of a few hours, an efficient force of three thousand well armed men was ready to aid the regular troops in the defence of the city. At night every precaution was attended to, which might prevent an attack from without, or frustrate an insurrection within. A large body of troops was planted in Doric Square, until a late hour in the evening, strong guards were posted in every quarter of the city, and lights were placed in the houses for the purpose of illuminating the streets. These, together with the galloping to and fro of the Dragoons, the marching of the patrols, the challenges of the different sentries, and the gleaming of their arms, gave the city a martial and dread appearance.

All was now anxiety, in regard to the probable fate of the prisoners who had been taken at Beauharnois, and to the subsequent movements of the rebels. The quarter in which they were reckoned most formidable, was at Napierville in the county of L'Acadie, at which place they had, to the number of 2000 taken up a position, in the expectation of receiving subsidies from the United States.

Extensive preparations were accordingly made on Monday the fifth, for sending a sufficient force to attack them, and on that and the two following days, all the steamboats were employed in transporting troops to Laprairie. Sir John Colborne himself assumed the command of the expedition, and was accompanied by Major Generals Clitherow and Sir James M'Donald, with their respective suites. The whole force consisted of a Park of Artillery of 12 Guns, 2 troops of the Queen's Dragoon Guards, 4 of the 7th Hussars, 2 of the Mont-

real Cavalry, the Grenadier Guards, the 24th, the 71st, and 73d Regiments, with part of the 15th.

On the departure of this force, vague rumours were afloat, to the effect, that the whole country on the Richelieu was in arms, and that a strong force had collected on the North side of the St. Lawrence at Terrebonne and St. Rose, none of which movements were, however of so serious a nature as not be suppressed by the local volunteer force, though undoubtedly if the rebel movements had been successful elsewhere, they would not have been so easily suppressed. Indeed, when we consider the whole rebellion from first to last, we can scarcely imagine the possibility of a scheme being so badly planned and executed. Had the insurgents risen simultaneously throughout the province, and the disaffected between the Three Rivers and Montreal attacked the city at the same time as those from the North and West, and had their friends within risen to their aid, the event, though it would undoubtedly have been the same as it is, might not have been gained with so little bloodshed, although it would have afforded the loyalists the opportunity of sweeping the traitors from the face of the earth. However blood-thirsty and harsh this sentiment may appear, it would, in fact, have been the most merciful dispensation to both, for peace and tranquillity will never exist in this Province, whilst the mass of Canadian "habitans," or their influential demagogues are placed on an equal footing with British subjects of the same degree. But to return.

On Tuesday morning the 6th instant, a body of four hundred rebels, headed by Côté and Gagnon, crossed the lines at Rouse's point near the village of Lake Champlain, and attacked a small force of volunteers stationed at La Cole, in the hope of opening up a communication between the United States and Napierville, then the head quarters of the rebels under Dr. Nelson. This being a point of the utmost importance to them, inasmuch as their sole hope of procuring arms, lay in the opening of the communication, it was natural that they should make every effort to do so. They accordingly succeeded in forcing one of the out-pickets of the volunteers, not however, it would appear, without such loss as caused them for some time to delay their attack upon the mill, in which the volunteers were placed, by which means time was afforded the latter to send for a reinforcement from Major Schriver, of Hemmingford. When this arrived, the volunteers, still greatly inferior in number, gallantly attacked the rebels in the face of a six pounder, which they speedily

captured, and compelled them to retreat with the utmost precipitation, leaving eleven dead, and eight prisoners besides two hundred and fifty stand of arms, and a quantity of ammunition. It is deeply to be regretted that two of the volunteers were killed in the action, and two wounded.

Notwithstanding this repulse of the rebels by the gallant volunteers of Odeltown, the post was of so great importance that it was determined by the rebel leaders to make another attack on it. Accordingly, at about 11 A. M. of the 8th, they advanced upon Odeltown to the number of about one thousand, under the command of Dr. Nelson, and attacked the outposts of the volunteers who were commanded by Col. Taylor. He immediately ordered the concentration of his small force, of 200 men, upon Odeltown Church. The enemy extended around them and commenced a sharp fire which was continued for some time with but little effect on either side. The rebels, however, soon shewing a disposition to advance on the church, the cannon, previously captured, was brought to bear upon them, and was three times fired with tremendous effect; the Volunteers, however, being so vastly inferior to the enemy, in point of numbers, were compelled to retire within the church. Several desperate efforts were made by the attacking party to recapture the gun, which was left outside, but so destructive a fire was kept up from the windows, as to render all their attempts abortive. Several brilliant sallies were made by the volunteers, which ended in the complete discomfiture of the rebels. After the action had lasted about two hours and a half, they retreated, leaving fifty of their number dead, and carrying off several wounded. On the part of the volunteers one Captain and four men were unfortunately killed, and one Lieutenant and nine men wounded.

From that time may be dated the entire dispersion of the rebels, for it appears by the following despatch from Colonel Eden, which is dated the 10th, that they did not remain long at Napierville, after their defeat at Odeltown.

§ NAPIERVILLE, 10th Nov. 1838.

Saturday, 9. A. M.

SIR, I am directed by the Commander of the Forces, to inform you that the force under his command, has just arrived here. The rebels, to the number of 2000, evacuated the town about two hours ago, and about the same number had previously gone off, many of them having thrown away their arms. The Cavalry are now in pursuit of the former, on the Chateauguay road. Colonel Love's column reached the town, from St. Valentine, at the same time with the Head Quarter division.

I have the honor to be, Sir, your most obedient servant,
JOHN EDEN, D. A. G.
Colonel Wetherall, C. B., Commanding, Montreal.

A considerable body of the Beauharnois, and Chateauguay rebels, were at this time on their march to Napierville, but hearing of the discomfiture of their friends, they immediately dispersed, setting at liberty the prisoners whom they had taken at Beauharnois, not, however, before holding a consultation, whether they should shoot them or not. About the same time, the few rebels who still remained at Beauharnois, were dislodged by the Glengarry Highlanders, and a Company of the 71st Regiment, all under the command of Colonel Carmichael. They released the prisoners that had been taken on board of the Brougham, who spoke in very high terms of the kindness shewn them by the Rev. Mr. Quintel, Curé of Beauharnois,—although, in other respects, they did not meet with the gentlest treatment. The Glengarry men continued their march to St. Remi, where they met the main body of the force and were remanded to Beauharnois. A similar dispersion had likewise taken place of a strong body of rebels who had taken up an advantageous position, and thrown up a trench about fourteen miles from the mouth of the Chateauguay river, at the house of a rebel of the name of Baker, whose rank cowardice and hypocrisy would disgrace even the gallows. While the rebels were in this position the Huntingdon Volunteers under Major Campbell, advanced to attack them, but as the rebels mustered nearly eleven hundred, whilst the number of the volunteers did not amount to 300, it was deemed imprudent to attack them in their entrenchments. The volunteers accordingly took up a position within sight of the enemy's entrenchments, and awaited the arrival of reinforcements, which were expected from Dundee. During the time that they were in this position a skirmish took place between Captain Reid's company, and about two hundred of the enemy, in which the former, after gallantly defending themselves, lost one man. Upon drawing out his force to attack the rebels, Major Campbell was informed that they were retiring on St. Martin, and he accordingly pursued them, taking a considerable number of prisoners.

The last movement, on the part of the rebels, worth noticing, was their seizure of the Boucherville Mountain, but hearing that a company of the 66th regiment was in the neighbourhood, they precipitously took to flight, leaving three guns, a few small arms, and a considerable quantity of ammunition, particularly Artillery cartridges.

Having thus briefly detailed the leading movements which occurred during the rebellion, let us for a moment consider its probable consequences. Five hundred prion-

ers are now in gaol upon the charge of the highest political offence that man can commit. Of these, probably two thirds are guilty of the crime in a high degree, and deserve the severest punishment. To inflict death on all such would be proceeding with, perhaps, too much rigour, but, unless some stern examples are made, the integrity and justice of the empire cannot be maintained. The French Canadians are incapable of being gained over by love or condescension, and they must therefore be taught submission with a rod of iron. Hundreds of families are now reduced by the effects of

civil war, to a state the most deplorable that can well be imagined. What is to become of them, situated as many of them are, without a house or clothing to protect them from the piercing rigours of a Canadian winter, fatherless infants, and widowed mothers, without a morsel to sustain the craving wants of nature, and many too, innocent? God only knows. The picture is horrible, but it is no less true. For the amelioration of this awful misery, some remedy must be adopted. Let the property of the accursed authors of so much misery be confiscated, and a portion of it carefully

meted out to the destitute; let those who are not doomed to more severe punishment, be compelled to labour for the support of their miserable victims, let the lands be appropriated to honest loyal subjects; let loyalty, fidelity, industry and enterprise, be encouraged, and this Colony from being a burden to the Empire, and the theatre of rebellion and bloodshed, will spring up in renewed youth, and prove a source of wealth to the Parent land and an honour and blessing to itself.

Amos & Dunder 1838

[The following text is a dense, handwritten manuscript in cursive script, likely a letter or a report. It is written on aged, yellowed paper and is heavily obscured by numerous diagonal and horizontal lines, possibly from a stamp or a watermark. The handwriting is difficult to decipher due to the obfuscation. The text appears to be a formal communication, possibly related to the historical context of the printed text above.]

I wish my Brother James in Italy last
and last week I had the letter returned to me, in
consequence, it appears, of its not being called for.
Please inform him of this & say I wish not to be
seen — I have sent Mr. Tho. Monaghan Glasgow
also a Narrative of the Rebellion. which will
picturise the necessity of your sending it. to
Glasgow for perusal — D. A. W.

NEW YORK
DEC 1868

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