The BATTLEFORD COLUMN

By G. H. NEEDLER

THE

NO

THE BATTLEFORD COLUMN

Versified Memories of a Queen's Own Corporal in the NORTHWEST REBELLION 1885

•

By G. H. NEEDLER

PROVINCIAL PUBLISHING CO. LTD.
RM 308 - 5165 SHERBROOKE WEST — MONTREAL

Compiled by

THE CANADIAN MILITARY JOURNAL
47 YONGE ST. TORONTO, (1) ONT.

Professor G. H. NEEDLER

To

TOM MARSHALL

and

RALPH ROSS

OTTER

THE BATTLEFORD COLUMN

I

We heard the call, — 'twas years ago three score
"Duck Lake !" resounded from the far Northtwest;
Fanatic still, as fifteen years before,
Riel returned on his deluded quest,
Red Men to join his Halfbreeds egging on :
Red River then, and now Saskatchewan.

II

Good men went with us, we were pals together,
And steps were springy as we marched away;
They're mostly fallen like leaves in wintry weather,
And few our number as we meet today.
Salute to them who shared with us the toil
But sooner shuffled off this mortal coil !

III

We'll let them live with us again tonight
While Memory's magic wand rejuvenates us,
Makes every dimming eye to sparkle bright,
And back to Eighteen-eighty-five translates us.
Tales will be told which growing age endears, —
Improved the vintage with the lapse of years.

IV

At middle night the word was flung at me
That shook me rudely from a sleep divine :
"Queen's Own are ordered to Winnipeg ! Now see
That all your men are on parade at nine."
I rubbed my eyes and countered with "Good God !",
And hustled out to rouse my corporal's squad.

V

March twenty-eight the muster, — Saturday;
Longest on strength had the first choice to go;
On Monday morning we were on our way
With rifles shouldered for the coming show.
From Armouries to Station, to entrain,
Toronto cheered godspeed to our campaign.

VI

By C.P.R. Toronto to Carleton Place,
Then up the Ottawa valley past Biscootasing,
Till "end of rail" abruptly cramped our pace
And faced us with a barrier amazing :
A savage land capricious Nature framed,
Now Winter to majestic silence tamed.

VII

The C.P.R. just then was incomplete,
Hiatuses were in it, numbering four;
Indeed, it was an engineering feat
To blast a road at all through that North Shore.
And it is needless to remark, perhaps,
No pullmans functioned yet between the gaps.

VIII

The first, of forty miles, we made in sleighs
Collected there to hasten our transition.
This even verse but little sense conveys
Of bumpety bumps that marked the road's condition;
A wild night ride it was, with frequent dumps,
Varied with sprints to limber up our stumps.

IX

The toiling teams next day found rest, and we
  Saw rails again. That wild where did of yore
Moose, wolf and bear hold rival sovereignty,
  Heard man's rude engines tell their reign was o'er.
When night was come, with moon and myriad stars,
We climbed aboard a waiting train of cars.

X

The cars were flatcars, boarded at the side
  To keep you from going sideways overboard;
The ends were free; the view was circle-wide,
  Better than observation-cars afford;
While all the open sky was requisitioned
To make them adequately air-conditioned.

XI

Like blanket-hooded ghosts in the weird gleam
  Of the full Easter moon — the mercury
At twenty-odd below — we snorted steam
  Into the frosty night in symphony.
And if by luck a man began to snore,
He slid to be our footstool on the floor.

XII

The night did pass somehow. O noble Sol,
  You did knock down the moon and giggling stars,
And made at last your mounting rays to fall
  Upon the riders on those damned flatcars.
Never, O never, was it better timed,
The hour when o'er that eastern verge you climbed.

XIII

Yet — base ingratitude ! — we soon must swear
That you, Old Sol, could not the sport forego
Of pouring down all day that blinding glare
On weary devils hiking through the snow.
Miles two-and-twenty westward o'er the ice
You smote us in the face, — it wasn't nice !

XIV

The shortest distance twixt two points, they say,
Is the straight line between. I doubt it, for
Old Euclid never hiked across that bay,
Ice-bound, snow-clad, of Lake Superior.
And yet it was the best that we could do
In dodging C.P.R. gap number two.

XV

You lay that night where ever you were able,
  Crawled in somewhere for better or for worse;
Some pals with me found fitting inn a stable,
  When every man was working like a horse.
You couldn't look to such sequestered post,
Just over night, to play the perfect host.

XVI

He would be damned if his tired team would haul
  Another load across the bay that day !
The Colonel and his party, they might all
  Just go to hell, — 'twas all he had to say.
With that he padlocked fast the stable door,
Sought his log cabin and was seen no more.

XVII

Not any man in all the universe
  Had ever spoken to the Colonel so.
The Colonel, — well, his language was much worse
  When he would let vituperatives flow;
He had a quite select vocabulary,
Transmogrifying every adversary.

XVIII

He simmered down on letting off some steam,
  And lost no time in giving a decision :
He'd given him half an hour to rest his team
  And let his schedule undergo revision.
The Q.O.R. rearguard must cross that bay
And join the Column ere the close of day.

XIX

Those thirty frosty minutes lingered past
While we did various stunts to keep us warm,
And when the terminus ad quem had come at last,
We tapped the cabin door just to inform
The teamster he should hitch up — and no fooling !
To run us over, — such the Colonel's ruling.

XX

No door was opened; from teamster ne'er a word
To say he would revise his first intention.
When our unfavourable report he heard,
The Colonel's words were hardly fit to mention.
They meant : Smash stable door, hitch team and sleigh,
Night will be here before we've crossed that bay !

XXI

No sooner said than done ! — The team meanwhile
  Had fed on oats and hay to their contentment,
And when we hitched them up in proper style,
  They didn't show exhaustion or resentment.
Bobsleigh and team were ready in a trice
To move downhill to where we took the ice.

XXII

Climbing aboard, the Colonel, good old scout,
  Perched on the edgeboard. As we drove below,
The board turned sharply in and he turned out
  A backward dive into five feet of snow.
The teamster should have had the tailboard in,
And obviated thus the O.C.'s spin.

XXIII

Good discipline suppressed our risibility
  To see our O. C. take that somersault;
We heaved him slowly back to visibility,
  Explaining it was all the teamster's fault. —
'Twas just as well the teamster wasn't there
To see the Colonel's language split the air.

XXIV

The team was not exhausted when by night
  They'd pulled rearguard and Colonel across the bay;
The teamster got them back, no doubt, alright,
  His wrath, too, tempered by the extra pay.
Humane the teamster was, but no diversion
Must bottleneck our should-be-fast excursion.

XXV

Some rail, a gap, more rail, a gap again, —
  Eleven miles and nine, — O welcome shock !
Believe it or not, of real cars a train
  Absorbed us on arrival at Red Rock !
Vale ! Avaunt ! Farewell, O thou North Shore !
No syncopated rail-routes any more !

XXVI

We slept ! O sweet restorer, balmy Sleep !
  O morphic, metamorphic sleep sublime,
Sound, heavy, fathomless, profound and deep !
  (For Rip van Winkle's snooze'we just lacked time.)
"My blessings on the man", says Sancho Panza,
"Who invented sleep !" Amen ! (Sleep out the stanza.)

XXVII

Nor eats nor sleeps to date could well be said
  To be of sumptuous regularity :
One highlight was a midnight table spread
  At a lumber camp extemporaneously :
Fat pork and treacle, buns and pies galore,
With steaming teapots! — Come, Boys, have some more!

XXVIII

A thousand miles from home ! And now another
  Thousand will take us westward on so far
That we'll have other troubles than to bother
  About what happens on the C.P.R.
We'll bid adieu to the long iron rail,
And nothward strike on foot the prairie trail.

XXIX

There is a station we remember well,
  The place where first they dumped us on the plain;
The C.P.R. has named the place Qu'Appelle,
  As you may note in passing on the train.
It was a godforsaken rendez-vous, —
But there was compensation in the view.

XXX

The Prairie ! Lo ! It is, it is the Prairie,
  This wonder vast that now I first behold.
Near close of day the world's great luminary
  Flooding the rolling ocean with its gold;
My eyes drink deep the golden overflow,
All self is lost in the enfolding glow.

MIDDLETON

XXXI

Latrines are things of stern necessity
  Where troops are camped for any length of time;
And so I found myself but little free
  To gaze enraptured on that scene sublime.
My first "fatigue" as corporal was to pick
Five men to dig those trenches double quick.

XXXII

Forgive my mention of the circumstance.
  It's just because in retrospect I see
What men of note my party picked by chance
  Were destined all in later life to be :
A doctor, judge, professor, bishops twain
Got started right trench-digging on the plain.

POUNDMAKER

XXXIII

With base of operations at Qu'Appelle,
  The strategy G.H.Q. had worked upon
Had us go too to see that they got hell
  Down along the South Saskatchewan;
But saving Battleford gave prior work,
And so our route was shifted with a jerk.

XXXIV

By train they shot us west another spell
  — Two hundred miles — nor sad we were we weren't
To linger longer frigid at Qu'Appelle,
  But soon to hit the trail north from Swift Current.
With message to Poundmaker : "Will you, please,
Statim from Battleford call off your Crees !"

XXXV

Our Column on the march ! The rising ground
  Might now and then give fore and aft the view
Of horse and foot and wagons as they wound
  In devious curve past knoll and prairie slough :
A two-mile serpent crawling daily on,
Coiling to rest at dark, uncoiled at dawn.

XXXVI

Snow-patches dotted still the ground, but lo !
  Springing triumphant from the prairie floor
A million crocuses their petals show,
  Singing, with us, of winter's bondage o'er;
In all their multitudinous beauty spread,
Heedless of warring men's discordant tread.

XXXVII

Unnumbered bison grazed of old this plain,
  Coming and going with each season's call;
Now mile on mile the fields of golden grain
  Before the reaper in the autumn fall :
We saw the deep-worn paths to the drinking-place,
And bones still bleaching from the hunter's chase.

XXXVIII

When tents were up 'twas alright overhead;
  But lingering winter kept the prairie damp,
As we knew nightly when we made our bed
  Hard by some slough where they would pitch the [camp,
At morn the groundsheets must be pulled with care
To leave the frosted ground without a tear.

XXXIX

A few weeks later, what a change was wrought
  When summer took possession of the scene !
'Twas not just warm, the days were devilish hot,
  And night brought welcome respite in between.
No tents were pitched while we were on the move, —
Our spreading canopy the stars above.

XL

What leaden slumber wrapped us as we lay,
  Too weary long to listen to the swoop
Of nighthawk darting on its insect prey
  Ghostlike unseen above the prostrate troop !
"Get up ! Get up ! Get up !" — short night was done,
And with the light our march again begun.

XLI

There is an art in sleeping on the ground;
  Whether your corp is angular and hollow,
Or in smooth curving lines of beauty wound
  After the model, maybe, of Apollo,
You fit corporeal protuberances
Into the varying terrain's sinuous chances.

XLII

We didn't work on any eight-hour day, —
  At times it might be all the twenty-four;
We hoped we earned our fifty cents of pay
  And couldn't strike to make it any more.
The soldier isn't backed by Union rules,
And never gets a chance to chuck his tools.

XLIII

A new-made corporal may put on some swank :
The day will come when he, could he contrive it,
Would more than willingly undo his rank,
And just demote himself again to private.
A Corporal's Guard — three men —
[will show him what
A prize with those two bally stripes he got.

XLIV

A frosty night at the South Saskatchewan :
A Corporal's Guard was called to close the ring.
About the camp. I was the two-striped man
Proudly detailed to do the novel thing.
Three men to put in sentry turn aright,
To shoot potential prowlers in the night.

XLV

You know the mathematics of the case ?
  You just take one plus two and multiply
By eight, — those hours you see make up the space
  Of day and night as round the clock they fly.
The day-half of a Corporal's Guard is fair, —
It's posting men at night that makes you swear.

XLVI

You've posted your man out there on sentry beat
  (O might I take his place to keep awake !) ;
The two in the tent beside you slumber sweet,
  Huddled in blankets till their turn they take;
While you, poor devil, if you close an eye,
"Asleep on duty !". — A firing-squad, you die.

XLVII

For a change you pray that some dare-devil brave,
  Upon his bloody scalping business bent,
Might pass your sentry, — how would you behave
  To halt his operations in your tent ?
Would those two sleeping scoundrels there protect you?
Or, dead in slumber, let him just dissect you ?

XLVIII

To pass the time you bead your chain of sins,
  Swearing, at least they don't deserve this night;
You muse on have-beens and on might-have-beens
  Till debits, credits dancing blur your sight :
All in a mad mosaic, one by one,
Things you might, could, or would or should have done.

XLIX

Past midnight — brain is giddy — a double murder
  Would give that brace of snorers their quietus !
A Lady named Macbeth — they never heard her —
  She did it in that famed dramatic treatise !
— But no ! You couldn't wash your hands, — and then
Another firing-squad — you're dead again.

L

Tardy Aurora in her chariot hurls
  At last a light on prairie and on river,
And the full Day his flag of life unfurls
  As it hath been forever and forever.
The glory of that dawn is your reward, —
Forgot the nightmare of a Corporal's Guard.

LI

Hardtack and pork and beans and bully beef
  And bully beef and beans and pork, hardtack
Contributed to Battleford's relief
  By keeping Otter's Column on the track;
Coffee and tea appeased the thristy throttle
And, water lacking, filled the water-bottle.

LII

Beyond the tally of the permutations
  And combinations of this fourfold diet
Our Company chef had his own variations
  And ways all wondrous to diversify it;
With water drawn, mayhap, from buggy slough
Tom Connor still concocted something new.

LIII

Once only Tom's inventive genius stuck,
  The bottom knocked clean out of his cuisine;
It was the day that the Dead Hills we struck,
  No scrap of fuel or water to be seen;
We chiselled off our hardtack in the raw,
And chewed dried apples to employ the jaw.

LIV

Our trail struck Eagle Creek one day, to find it
  For wagons perilously near too deep;
Of course the Scouts and Mounties didn't mind it,
  We hikers couldn't take it at a leap;
Clothes doffed, held high, we waded the chill tide,
Danced off the shivers as our pelts we dried.

LV

Our pace rolled up ere long the prairie trail,
  And when one day the Column coiled at dark,
But three short miles to go, and we might hail
  The winning of the long expected mark.
How should we find them — succour long delayed —
Huddled for shelter in the Fort's stockade ?

LVI

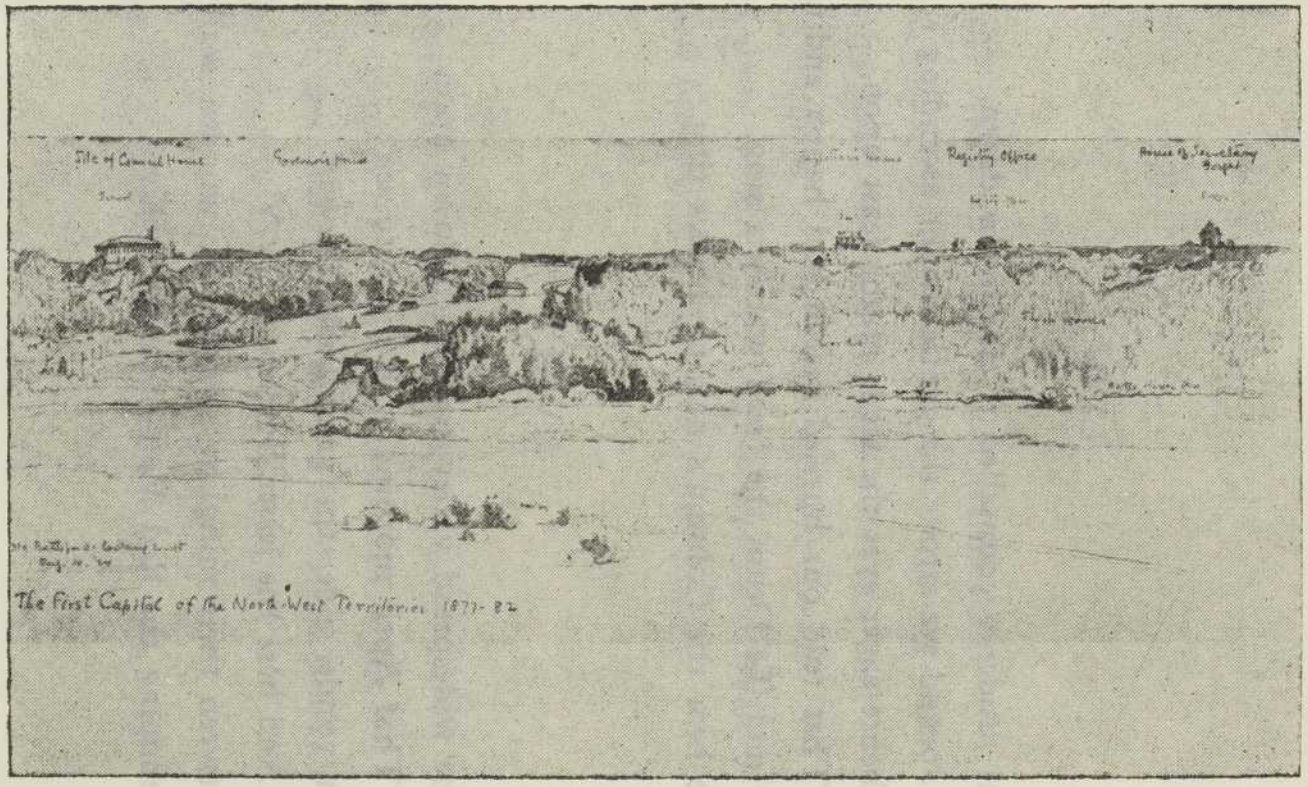
Temptation was to take the risk and scout
  The three miles farther under veil of night
To spot, perchance, the braves who danced about
  The fires that sent aloft the lurid light
Reflected in the welkin's flaming hue
Beyond the sloping ridge that hemmed our view.

LVII

But prudence counselled to await the dawn. —
  Jocund we strode the gentle height ascending
Whence eager eyes the scene might feast upon,
  That told our hurried march had happy ending,
A loud Te Deum the freed watchers sing,
To hear the Column's nearing bugles ring.

LVIII

The widespread valley we looked down upon
  That April morning was a joy to see :
On yonder side, the great Saskatchewan
  And here the lesser Battle; in the V
Between their mingling streams the wooden wall
Stemming the Red Men's bloody carnival.

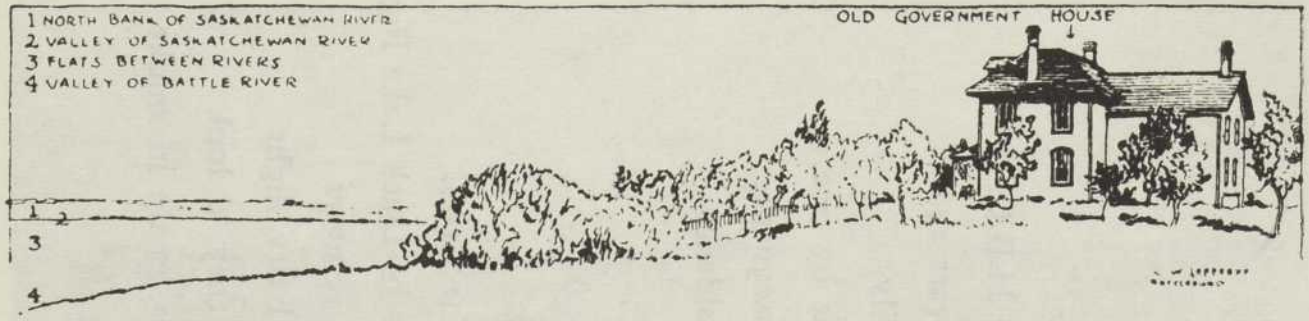

Site of Council House
Registry Office
The First Capital of the North-West Territories 1871-82

LIX

This side the Battle River the H.B.C.
  A post had planted many years agone,
To which had gravitated steadily
  A group of other traders one by one;
At length the evolutionary consequence
Was District Governor and Residence.

LX

Before the bloody rapine of the Crees,
  On warpath now since news of Duck Lake Fight
And Frog Lake Massacre, the refugees
  Escaped with life alone by hasty flight
To the Fort's shelter, whence they 'd look
And see their homes and stores go up in smoke.



1 NORTH BATTLEFORD 2 BATTLEFORD 3 VALLEY OF SASKATCHEWAN RIVER 4 POLICE BARRACKS 5 FLATS BETWEEN RIVERS
6 BRIDGE OVER BATTLE RIVER 7 ROAD TO BATTLEFORD FROM SOUTH 8 INDIAN STORE HOUSE 9 VALLEY OF BATTLE RIVER

LXI

The plunderers didn't fire all offhand, —
  Why cut unnecessarily the fun !
It was a pleasant pastime that could stand
  Repeating, so they touched off one by one :
Free show staged nightly by the whooping devils,
While owners helpless watched the fearsome revels.

LXII

There was a School, to help the Indian youth
  To make from bow to plough the hard transition;
It hadn't yet gone up in smoke, — in truth
  Our Column was a timely prohibition.
But it was smashed and plundered, in and out,
Some active fowl had fled the general rout.

LXIII

One day I entered the dismantled house
  And stood a while in silent contemplation
Amid the ruin of the wild carouse,
  Its every room in utter desolation;
It will be picturesque — you'll not deny it —
What's left behind an Indian drunken riot.

LXIV

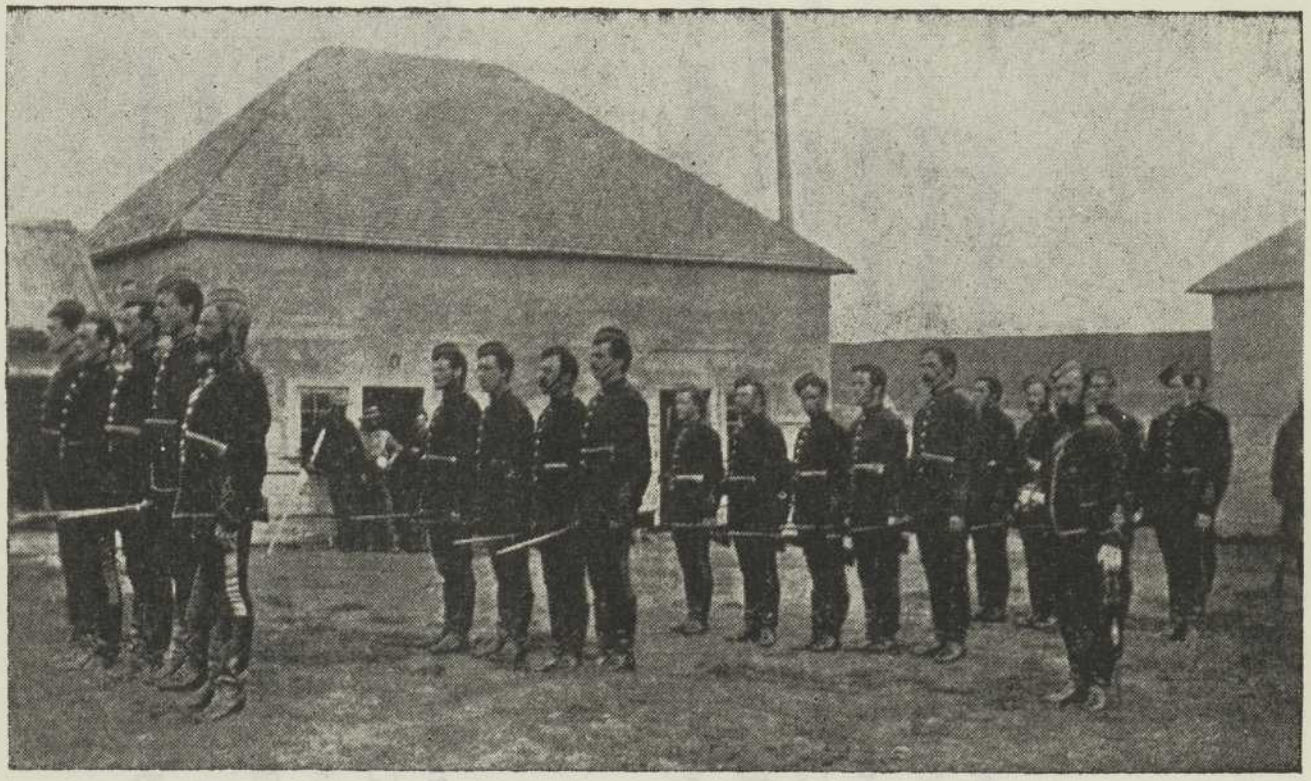
A thing I saw there, passing strange to tell, —
  A small reed organ had escaped the ravage !
Did silently the choir invisible
  Speak from those keys to charm and soothe the savage ?
Some greater Medicine Man's more potent charm
Reduce to palsy the uplifted arm ?

LXV

Amid the feathers of a ripped-up bed
  And broken furniture promiscuous flung,
Torn leaves around in wild disorder spread
  Of Gospels printed in the Indian tongue,
A fitting relic of the mad carouse,
A volume all unbroken lay — *Bleak House !*

LXVI

Great-hearted Dickens ! How that name's romance
  Did fill the silence ! Yet to me unknown
How to that corner of the world some chance
  The living semblance of himself had thrown.
Six hundred hailed our coming, of them one
Did boast his very flesh and blood, — his son.



CAPTAIN DICKENS' DETACHMENT N.W.M.P.

LXVII

Now Captain Dickens of the N.W.M. Police,
  With a detachment of two dozen men,
Was stationed at Fort Pit, and lived in peace
  Among the Crees of Big Bear's country, — when
The Frog Lake Massacre all too plainly told
'Twere vain to try the tiny post to hold.

LXVIII

'Tis a wonder how he got away, and how
  Down the great river, with all his men on board.
Through blocks of ice steering the leaky scow,
  He made the ninety miles to Battleford.
He had what is denominated "guts";
They said : "Surrender !", — he retorted : "Nuts !"

CUT KNIFE HILL

LXIX

Destined we were ten weeks to dedicate
  Within that zone to many an operation
That didn't leave us time to vegetate
  Or think we were just off on a vacation.
High grew the stakes, as the stern game was played,
And ere it ended must a price be paid.

LXX

Five men lay dead one night beside my tent
  "Reconnaissance in force to Cutknife Hill";
I will not pause minutely to comment
  On trying obstacles o'releaped with skill.
The threat was turned : Poundmaker, sly offender,
Sought presently a parley for surrender.

SURRENDER OF POUNDMAKER

LXXI

Last clash at arms on our North Continent
  Twixt Red and White, the curtain here was rung
On the long drama; the fading light now spent,
  Here fell the Red Man's goetter-daemmerung :
A fitting stage the spreading prairie's sward
By waters rune-wise whispering "Battleford".

LXXII

The painter's brush has fixed th' historic act :
  The Chief's small band; the officers surround
The G.O.C., in portraiture exact;
  The Pipe of Peace between them on the ground.
Pathetic scene it was, — one to dictate,
The other bide inexorable fate.

LXXIII

Our camp was shifted after Cutknife Fight
  Across the Battle to the level plain
To westward of the Fort. Our grand delight
  Guard duty, — guards and guard again !
To keep the V-shaped terrain all protected,
A line of rifle pits the streams connected.

LXXIV

What thoughts were his, in prison walls now pent
  With four sub-chiefs and the mad slayers twain
From his band self-confessed, proud head so bent
  Of him who life-long ranged the boundless plain !
Poundmaker musing, smoking, squatted there
As oft the guard-room vigil I might share.

LXXV

'Tis plain I must by-pass an episode
  Or two, lest I should let my story swell
To too great bulk, and bog me on the road;
  For instance, I can hardly stop to tell
How brave Tom Marshall trained an Indian Chief,
Or Sergeant World damned that damned pudding-thief.

LXXVI

An Indian warrior is a sight to view,
  His make-up of exquisite artistry,
Face camouflaged in paints of lurid hue,
  All wrought to hypnotize the enemy. —
Our dames and maids daub nails and lips and cheeks,
Themselves remaking into rival freaks.

LXXVII

It should be said, not every Indian brave
  Is dressed like every other, — not at all.
He swears he'll not be any tailor's slave,
  But always just an individual.
"One only !" is his motto, and to that
He'll stick, from moccasin right up to hat.

LXXVIII

Chief Moosomin, for instance, wore for best
  — It was a formal call on our O. C. —
A long black broadcloth coat, red shirt, grey vest,
  And buckskin leggings fashioned cunningly;
Round his tall beaver hat a band of green
Studded with eagle feathers might be seen.

LXXIX

An army's belly can't be let go empty,
  For that, you know, is what it marches on;
Hardtack et cetera's not much to tempt ye,
  But barrels had to follow Middleton
Up to Fort Pitt; myself was one of forty
Detailed to be the steamer's escort party.

LXXX

A boat of sorts she was, the old Sternwheeler,
  A thing unique to thread the upper stretches
Of western streams, through sandbarred channels [feel her
  Undaunted way; keelless, in draught she fetches
Three feet or less; a stubnosed, squatty craft,
Her wheel a cylinder revolving aft.

LXXXI

Tobogganing down, there came a sudden jolt
  One day that caused a bit of consternation,
A sort of *sotto voce* thunderbolt
  Telling of interrupted navigation;
Is this old craft, thought I, so keen for heaven
To wreck herself and us, unwarned, unshriven ?

LXXXII

We calmed to see the captain's unconcern :
  The flat sternwheeler can't negotiate
The difficulty of a sudden turn
  In the swift stream; head-on she charges straight
Into the bank, backs out, — the current's force
Swings the bow round, and she resumes her course.

LXXXIII

Howe'er so great the wisdom that the pilot
  Accumulates in any season's running,
There isn't any use for him to file it
  For use next season; all his pilot cunning
Can do, is make a likely guess offhand
For deepest channel through the shifted sand.

LXXXIV

Predestined on some shallow place to stick
  X-times a day on every downward run,
She carries tackle to perform the trick
  Of getting loose, — which isn't always fun;
He had his choice, the foundered navigator,
To stick and starve there, or to extricate her.

LXXXV

She's stuck ! — Cranes swing; slides swiftly
[to the ground
On either side the bow a giant spar;
They strike the sand, the pulley ropes race round
The spinning capstan; so above the bar
She hoists herself, backing with wheel reverse :
Perhaps she's free, — or drifts on something worse.

LXXXVI

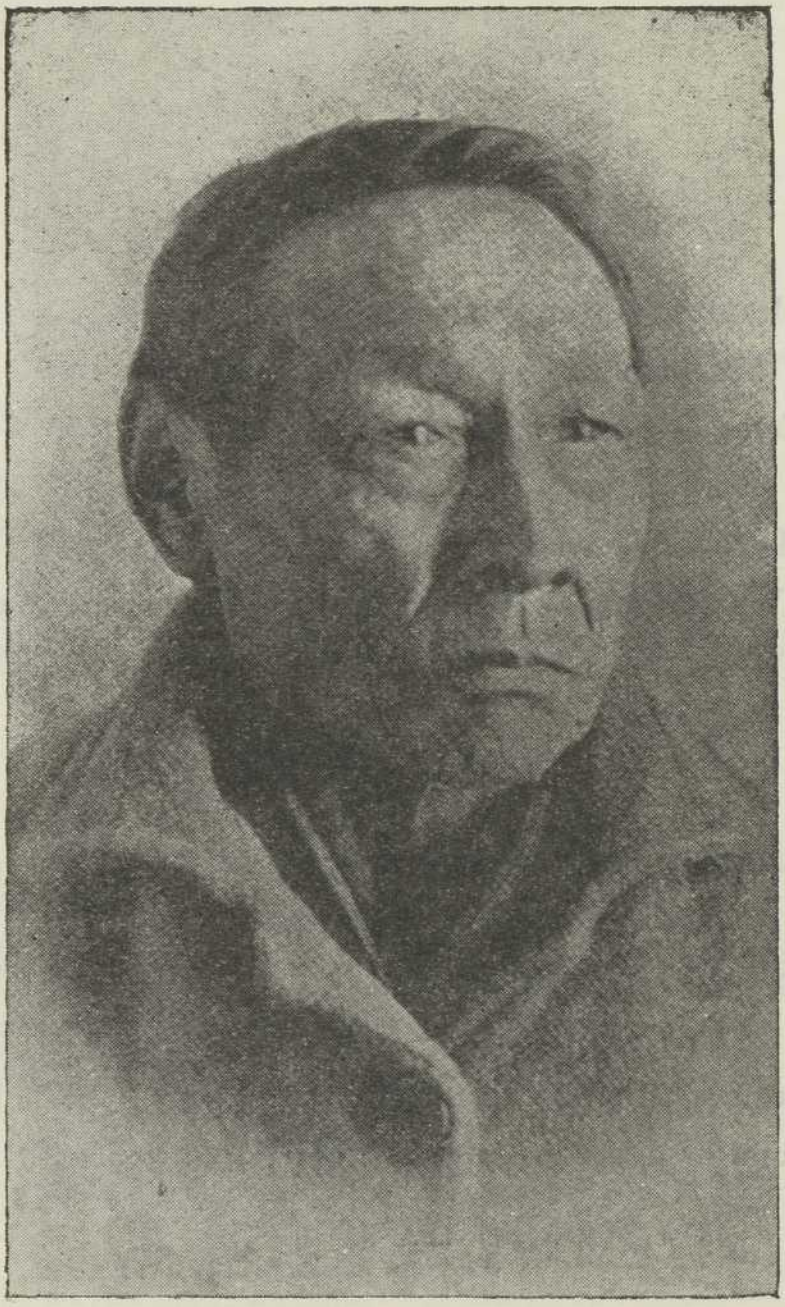
Now speed is king, the pace is lashed to fury
By truck and car and plane, and so you see she's
On Mississippi, Saskatchewan, Missouri
Put in the show-case labelled *Extinct Species.*
At last we get it rough, Old Time's the dealer;
So *Ave atque vale,* Old Sternwheeler !

LXXXVII

Meantime from Edmonton precariously
  Working his way adown the rampant river
Came Gunner Jingo, on the wily Cree
  A knockout wallop sternwise to deliver;
He found it wasn't just an easy nut
To crack, Big Bear entrenched at Frenchman's Butte.

LXXXVIII

Batoche o'erridden, captive now Riel
  Whisked southward to Regina to await,
In the blank solitude of prison cell,
  What yet might fall from the hard hand of fate,
From Battleford upstream the G.O.C.
Joined General Strange at Fort Pitt presently.



BIG BEAR

LXXXIX

Riel, Poundmaker now eliminated,
  Remained Big Bear alone of the Big Three;
But vasty spaces must be penetrated
  If you would sight the disappearing Cree.
The G.O.C. himself, so keen to find him,
Got bogged, and nearly left his boots behind him.

XC

In case that he might try to make the border.
  Fleeing before the Middletonian wrath,
To Otter at Battleford came sudden order
  Northward to dash, and so to bar his path :
An artful dodger was old man Big Bear,
And ne'er a footprint left he for us there.

XCI

Hearing our fare was drab, folks in Toronto
  Sent up of eats a wagon-train prodigious,
Such viands choice as you would wish or want to
  Titillate a palate most fastidious.
But, tell that tale of teasing Tantalus,
For rotten luck he hadn't one on us.

XCII

You'd almost swear old Middleton by chance
  Had heard of this, — 'twould make his
[mouth to water —
And that he must such thing discountenance
  As what a proper Field Force didn't oughter;
That very day came order to prepare
Our northward dash to ferret out Big Bear.

XCIII

Officers have privileges — if they take 'em;
God knows they should have some to balance us;
Some opportunities have they — if they make 'em —
And generally seem to come out plus.
We could take nothing with us, — a Commission
Could boxes with the baggage requisition.

XCIV

Our Varsity half of Company No. 4
Boasted also students of divinity,
And one of these was pretty sure to score
Where nerve was needed, — yes, or asininity;
He'd try to pry into obscure theology,
And had a nose for Officers' ideology.

XCV

That fateful day, when we had reached the landing,
  Waiting our turn to take the steam-boat ferry,
It so befell that we were idly standing
  A while beside the baggage, where some very
Mysterious boxes, too, the crossing waited : —
Our nosing theolog investigated.

XCVI

Not long, until the keen inquisitor
  Some rations quite heretical contacted;
His skill, with no pale thought-cast sicklied o'er,
  All kinds of delicacies soon extracted.
But time was up ! What he had there so slickly
Pried loose, could not be nailed again so quickly.

XCVII

When he was told the boxes had been tampered
With, the Colonel preached a spicy sermon;
Old Testamental epithets unhampered
Told us that we were something less than vermin.
Our Christian pal in his dark bosom hid it,
And none obliged the O. C. with who did it.

XCVIII

We thought the Colonel, when he'd had his inning,
Would call it square and rehabilitate us.
But no, no, no ! That was just the beginning
Of props to buttress up our rickety status.
Till late at night, to make the day's measure good,
We navvied a damned steamer full of wood.

XCIX

The Column's northward march began with dawn.
The Colonel soaked us all the blazing day;
Next to the Scouts and Mounties in the van
He stuck us, where pretence of danger lay.
Deploying, closing, doubling, swearing, solemn.
We did full twice the day's march of the Column.

C

All day we concertina'd right and left,
The Colonel just made sure we'd not forget it;
He never learned the author of the theft, —
We learned some wisdom as we swore and sweated :
The lesson that 'twas then, as now 'tis, true,
The many pay the follies of the few.

CI

We didn't reach the pole, but our direction
Was north; two hundred miles or so of search
Showed us of streams and lakes a large collection, —
Jackfish and Turtle and, farthest north, was Birch.
Belike, as we swinked, or cooled off with a swim,
The Chief knew more of us than we of him.

CII

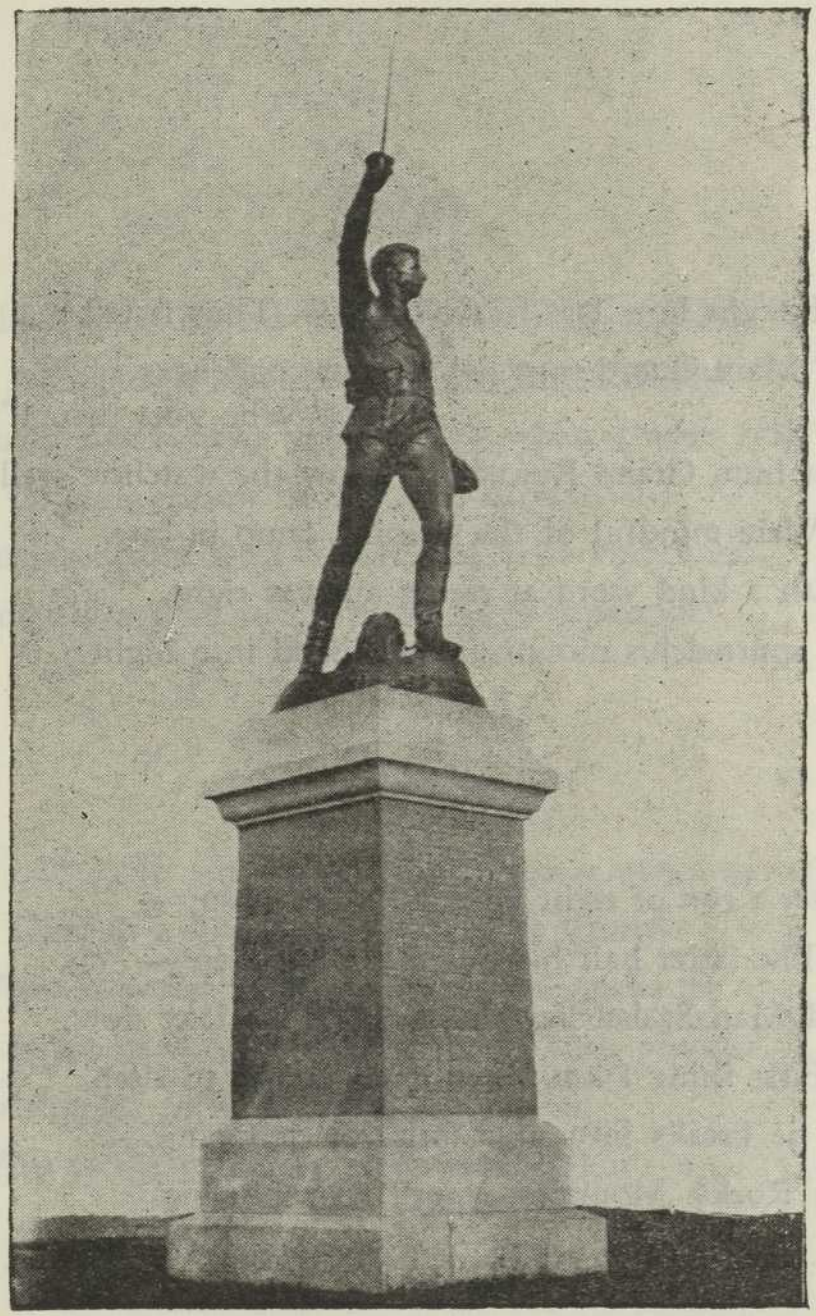
An exile from his band, a sad King Lear
With but a little boy for company,
He did slip through, — but soon to re-appear
Led by a Mountie to captivity.
I saw him at Prince Albert as we passed, —
A sight for pity, eagle caged at last.

CIII

We hustled down again to Battleford,
  Not, to be sure, with Big Bear to deliver;
Ten Thousand Greeks scarce more to joy restored
  By "Thalatta" ! than we by the great River.
July the First it was, Dominion Day,
And rumours floated of our homeward way.

CIV

Down the swift stream, from Fort Pitt coming fast,
  That morn two steamers rounded into view;
Startled we were, as we descried half-mast
  On one the flag that in the sunlight flew;
And sad we were, when soon the message spread :
The Midlanders' loved Leader there lay dead.



MONUMENT TO LT.-COL. WILLIAMS OF THE MIDLANDERS

CV

I thought how last I saw him. — Thus it fell :
"Main Guard turn out !", our challenge
["Who goes there !"
Met him, Grand Rounds to know the watchers well
Were mindful of the sleeping camp in care.
With a kind word at seeing all was right,
He spurred his mount and vanished into night.

CVI

After a run of eight hundred miles or so —
The latter half his waters rolling deep —
Old Man Saskatchewan says : "This lazy flow,
First thing I know, will put me off to sleep.
So he breaks into nine miles of galloping,
His Rocky Mountain youth remembering.

CVII

The Rapids leave a thousand swirling pools
  Along their shores, with moiling fish alive,
Huge, numberless; you ask, by what strange rules
  Of competition such a host survive.
No sense they seem to have, of jaws voracious,
And all is food to fill those maws capacious.

CVIII

A halt to let some following troops o'ertake us
  Gave us a day or two impatient leisure,
Wherein arose the question, how to make us
  Some pastime to turn boredom into pleasure.
So four of us made up an expedition
With tackle primitive to do some fishin'.

CIX

Old Isaac Walton would outlaw such slaughter :
A fragment of your shirt-tail for a bait,
They're on the jump before it strikes the water,
And 'twas a stunt the strike to extricate.
In half an hour we had a hundred pound
Of those fool fish yanked out upon the ground.

CX

Two saplings through the gills, we strung the whales,
As back to camp the trail again we found;
Believe it or not, — heads shoulder-high, the tails
Of some were dangling fairly to the ground.
A thunder-shower drenched us to the skin,
And night had fallen as we came trudging in.

CXI

We found a camp-fire with a nighthawk party;
They took our invitation, we took theirs;
Each saw the other tickled with the hearty
Exchange effected straightway of our wares;
'Twere vain to say which for the barter most did, —
Their Hudson's Bay rum punch, or fish we roasted.

CXII

There is, I wot, an Angler Incomplete
Will envious designate my story phony,
Or Doubting Thomas call it indiscreet
Wanting corroborative testimony.
Well, they just didn't, sixty years agone,
Accept those fish from Old Saskatchewan.

CXIII

In streamlets trickling from the glacier snow,
  Then roaring cascades, for a moment pent
In placid mountain lake, again to go
  On eager wandering through a continent,
Saskatchewan, thy deepening waters roll
From Rocky Mountain to far eastern goal.

CXIV

Five hundred miles midway upon thy tide,
  Our crowded craft an easy burden speeding,
Saskatchewan, at length we homeward hied,
  Our strange adventure like a dream receding;
Grateful, to thy lone shores we waved adieu,
As thoughts in tune with hurrying waters flew.

CXV

His flowing waters to a great inland sea
  Now given, the Old Saskatchewan at length
Finds rest from his long eager race, and he,
  Joining with comrade streams his mighty strength,
Ere long moves on with easy massive motion
To merge in the immensity of Ocean.

CXVI

A day and night we crossed that inland sea,
  From River's mouth to Selkirk labouring slow,
Straining for home, — a strange flotilla we :
  Two steamers filled, two barges each in tow,
Tossing like corks as wind-lashed waters swelled
Night-long, — by grace of heaven the cables held.

CXVII

He babbled daily on the sun-parched trail
  Of opportunities some day to follow,
Of cooling beverages, an endless tale
  Of iced John Collinses that he would swallow :
He seized his chance — from the first Selkirk bar
His comrades bore him to the baggage car.

CXVIII

In Winnipeg the kindly welcome met
  Lacked just one thing of what might be desired, —
The unpaved gluey streets so boggy wet
  Our show-parade came near to getting mired;
But mutual attachment fixed firm roots,
Though mud was working to detach our boots.

CXIX

Fort William and the Soo and Owen Sound
  Marked next our route; for by the C. P. R.'s
New line of steamers now a way was found
  To dodge the memories of those damned flatcars.
Those gaps are closed : now men shall nevermore
See what we saw and did on that North Shore.

CXX

Far off to port it lay, as through the night
  The *Athabasca* plowed across the deep,
While bunkless crowded we, as best we might,
  On deck or cabin floor snatched spells of sleep.
For hours befogged, the Captain couldn't see
Where lay the passage into Sainte Marie.

CXXI

Next Huron, Manitoulin, Georgian Bay
  To Owen Sound. A leap from sea to land.
E'en hospitality was now delay,
  When Welcome Home was looming close at hand
In gravitational acceleration
Our thoughts went plumb to North Toronto Station.

CXXII

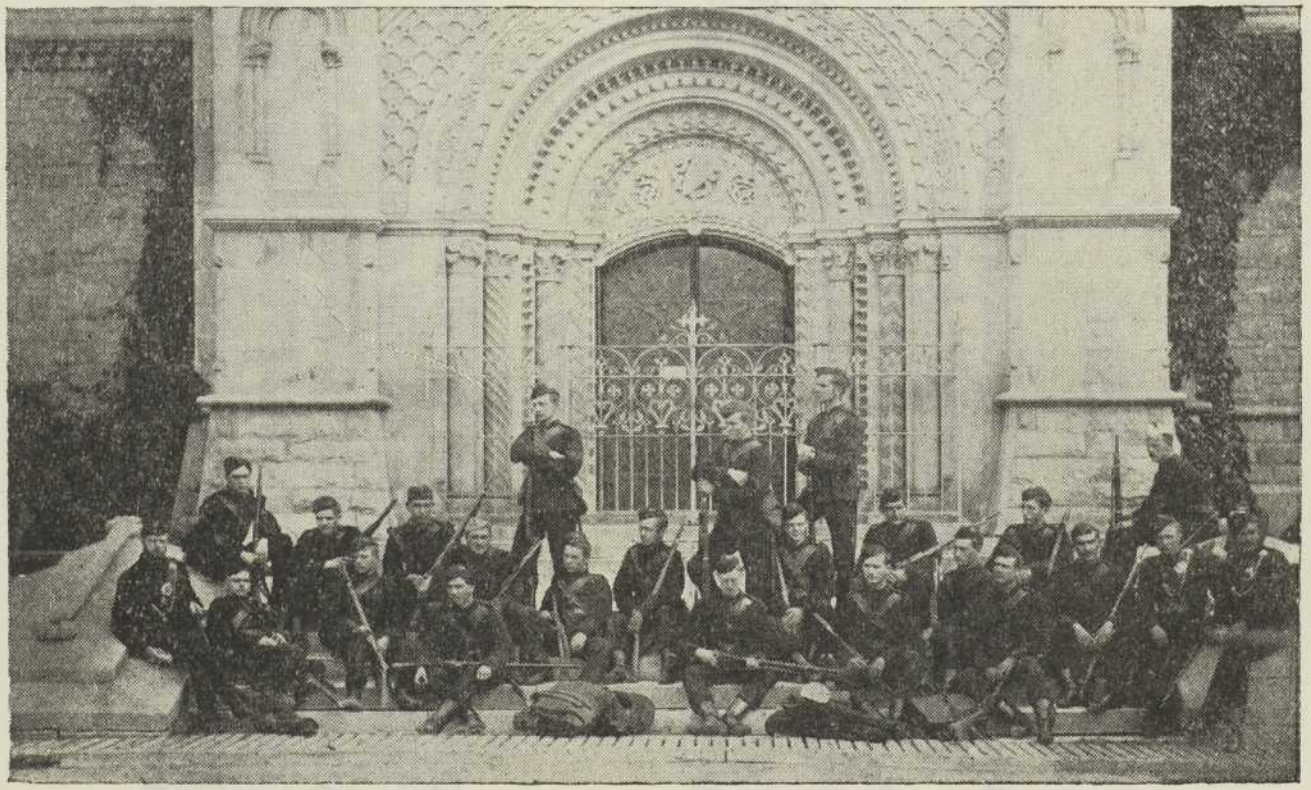
The Town was smaller three score years ago,
  But home-fires then kept just as brightly burning
As now for thousands from the bigger show
  In shiploads to their native shores returning.
Four years, four months, — for storm-
  [tried youths the same
Affection swells the welcoming acclaim.

CXXIII

Bouquet of violets set by maiden's hand
  The muzzle of each rifle tipped, as we,
To echoing notes of Queen's Own Bugle Band,
  Down through the peopled lane passed thrillingly
To the old Armouries. — Four months since when
We sallied forth ! And now 'tis Home Again !

CXXIV

There stood a Norman pile without the Town,
  Builded by men of faith that could not die,
A house for masters of the cap and gown
  And ardent youth whose vision roamed the sky;
Of strength and beauty rare embodiment,
Within its halls four years I came and went.



VARSITY HALF NO 4 CO'Y Q. O. R.

CXXV

Ere parting, to that College porch we came,
We Varsity men of common countersign,
That its rare sculptured arch might give the frame
To picture made for sake of auld lang syne. —
They most have crossed the bar, — yet, six are we
Who keep the tale of that leal Company.

CXXVI

Of Grenadiers, of Midlanders, Winnipeggers
In Middleton's command I can't much tell;
Suffice, they were a bunch of husky beggars
Who rushed that day and rounded up Riel.
Fish Creek ! Batoche ! — they made a job of it,
And finished hunting Big Bear round Fort Pitt.

CXXVII

Of General Strange, — Macleod to Edmonton
  In sleet and mud, communications cut,
Downstream in leaky barges — what a run !
  Till Big Bear stood him off at Frenchman's Butte.
The wild adventure's told, henceforth to live
In Gunner Jingo's thrilling Narrative.

CXXVIII

When sometimes faithful Memory leads me down
  The long, long vista of these vanished years,
Soon as the misty veil aside is blown
  A figure well beloved reappears :
Otter it is that through the mist I see, —
Otter, the Bayard of his country he.

CXXIX

With him again we 're west and northward
[speeding, —
Sometimes the going just a little rough —
Yet rough and tough not all too greatly heeding.
If only we can get there soon enough : —
Cooped up while homes were fired and
[war-whoops roared.
Six hundred hailed Otter's Column at Battleford.

CXXX

Trials far other flood the world today,
Undreamed-of in our world of Eighty-five;
Our weapons and equipment stowed away
But as museum relics still survive.
Our Snider-Enfields and our Gatling guns
Are just pea-shooters if the game is Huns.

CXXXI

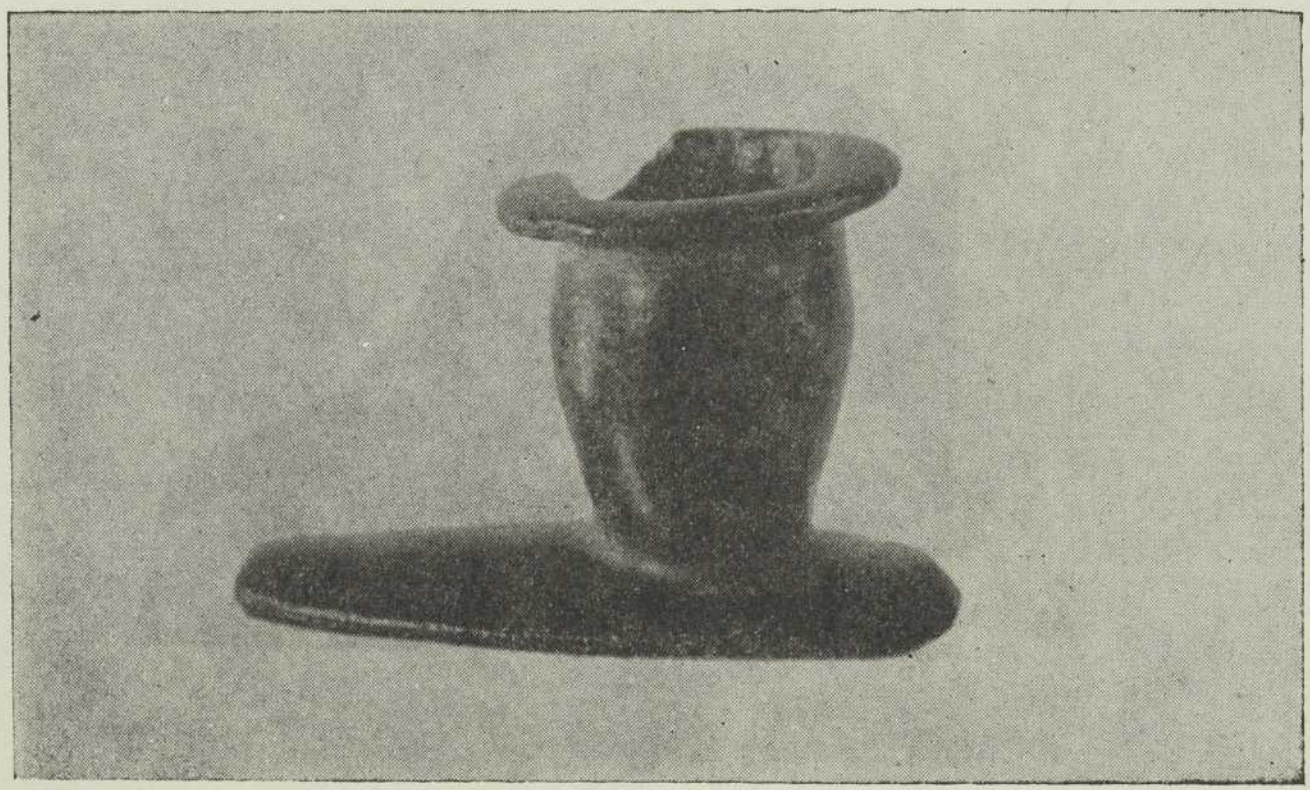
And yet, when Old Man History takes his pen
  To tell the tale of Eighteen-eighty-five,
Perchance he'll spare one flourish for the men
  Who kept the faith and saved their souls alive, —
Who smote the serpent, kept their country one.
And looked courageous to the rising sun.

CXXXII

POUNDMAKER'S PIPE

(In the Royal Ontario Museum)

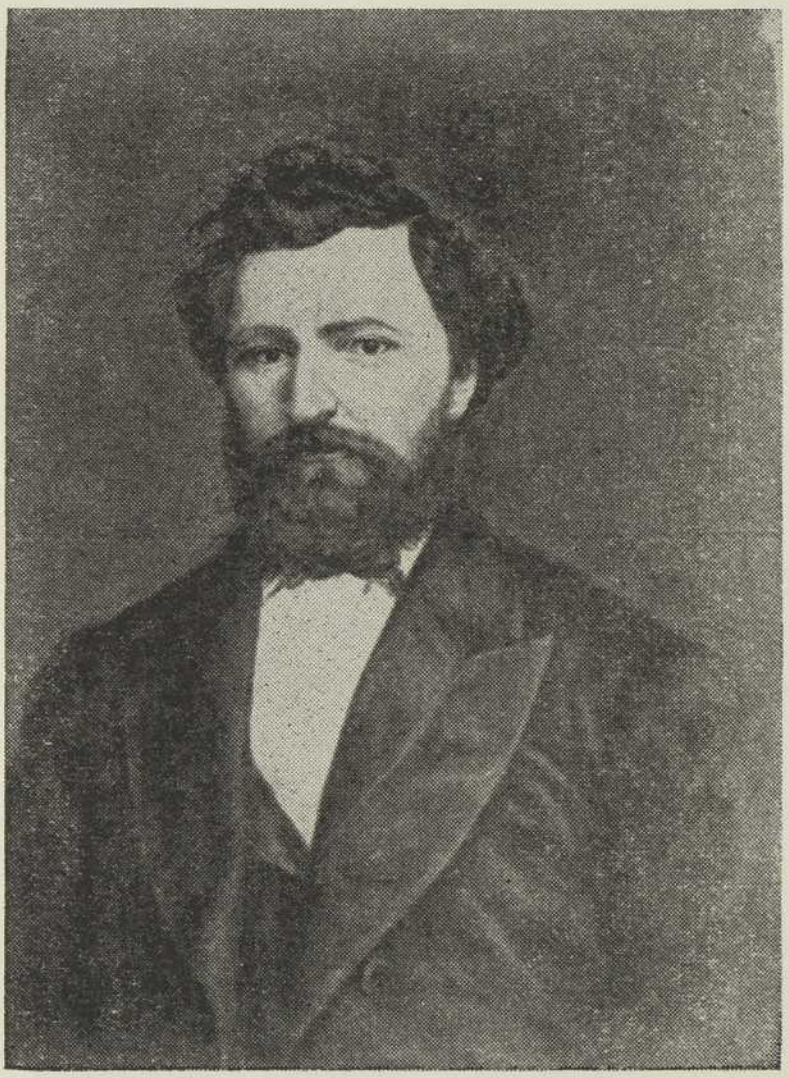
I sped with him, as the wild bison herd
He steered so deftly to the narrowing Pound;
I breathed with him, as eloquent he stirred
To wrath his painted warriors gathered round;
His dreams are dead that curled above this stone :
I muse of him forever here alone.



POUNDMAKER PIPE

FINIS : REGINA, NOVEMBER 16TH, 1885

Patriot, scheming zealot, would-be saint,
  Actor consorted oddly with the fool;
Builder of visions with one just complaint,
  Calling the Indian for his culprit's tool;
By two-fold crime he reaped his sure reward :
He chose the way of blood, — his way was hard.



LOUIS RIEL

Otter's Column

N. W. M. P. (1 gun)	50
"B" Battery, R. C. A. (2 guns)	113
"C" Co., I. S. C.	49
G. G. F. G.	51
Q. O. R.	274
Scouts	6
TOTAL :	543
Wagon Train (202 wagons)	202
GRAND TOTAL :	745

Otter's Force in the Cutknife Fight

N. W. M. P. (50 mounted, 1 gun)	75
"B" Battery, R. C. A.	80
"C" Co., I. S. C.	45
G. G. F. G.	20
Q. O. R. (including Ambulance Corps)	60
Battleford Rifles	45
	325

1 Gatling Gun
2 7-Pounders
48 Wagons

OUTLINE OF THE CAMPAIGN

When Louis Riel and his Halfbreed followers broke into armed rebellion, and defeated the North-west Mounted Police at Duck Lake on March 26th, 1885, it became evident at once that a large force would be needed to suppress them. There was perhaps also some method in their madness in bringing on the conflict at a moment when they felt themselves able to defy any government forces immediately available in the west, and while winter and the unfinished state of the Canadian Pacific Railway allowed them to think the advent of re-inforcements from the east very remote. By that time they might have the Indians on the warpath beside them, as well as the help from across the United States border, which Riel told them was sure to come.

The commander-in-chief of the Canadian forces could speed, as a civilian, from Ottawa to Winnipeg via Chicago, but permission could neither be asked for nor granted for Canadian troops to pass through

United States territory. So there was nothing to do but make the best of it in overcoming independently the enormous difficulties of the route to the west. Winnipeg had responded superbly in promptly furnishing troops, so that on the very day that he arrived in that city General Middleton was able to proceed with a considerable force to establish a base at Qu'Appelle. But the great bulk of the forces needed to suppress the rebellion had to be drawn from east of the north shore of Lake Superior, where several hundred miles of broken line remained in the unfinished Canadian Pacific Railway. The difficulty of overcoming this formidable physical obstacle was increased by the abnormally late winter of 1885, which covered that district with several feet of snow, and, as we passed through in the first week of April, sent the thermometer down to over twenty degrees below zero.

It was only a few days after the start west that we were faced with this, the hardest test of physical endurance of the whole campaign; and so the "North Shore" remains as our most vivid — and unhallowed — memory. The first gap in the C. P. R., of forty

miles, was covered in bobsleighs, the others on foot across the frozen bays of Lake Superior; on the bumpy railway roadbed between the gaps we rode — and froze! — on flatcars, notably a ninety-mile ride through the night. In spite of difficulties successive bodies of troops from Ontario and eastward pushed through the North Shore with commendable speed. By March 29th, three days after the Duck Lake Fight, mobilized units had begun to move. On April 13th Otter's Column, 745 strong, was able to start north from Swift Current, 2000 miles from Toronto. A week later part of General Strange's Column (which eventually totalled about 1,000 men) was on its way north from Calgary, 300 miles farther west. And when General Middleton, on May 9th, engaged the rebels in their final stand at Batoche, he had under his immediate command there a force of 890, while further troops to the number of nearly 2000 held his line of communication and the bases on the C. P. R.

The plan of the military operations was a simple one. From three bases on a 500-mile stretch of the Canadian Pacific Railway — Qu'Appelle, Swift

Current and Calgary — three columns moved northward to the scene of action. General Middleton commanded the whole, and was in immediate command of the main column operating toward the rebel head-quarters at Batoche on the south branch of the Saskatchewan River near its junction with the north branch. Lt.-Col. W. D. Otter was in command of the column striking north from Swift Current, with Battleford on the North Saskatchewan as its objective. The third column, under General T. B. Strange, advanced from Calgary to Edmonton and down the North Saskatchewan. The three columns finally converged at Battleford and Fort Pitt.

After the defeat of the main body of the Half-breed forces at Batoche, and the capture of Riel, General Middleton's Column moved on up the North Saskatchewan to Battleford. Meanwhile, Otter's Column, by a rapid march of 200 miles from Swift Current, had reached Battleford and released 567 persons, largely civilians with women and children, cooped up in the stockaded Fort in which they had taken refuge from the Indians; and Otter, with part of his force, had soon after had a clash with Pound-

maker's band at Cutknife Hill, 35 miles west of Battleford. Poundmaker and his chief men surrendered to General Middleton on the latter's arrival at Battleford. Middleton then moved up the river to Fort Pitt. By this time General Strange had marched the 200 miles from Calgary to Edmonton and made the further hazardous journey of 300 miles down stream to Fort Pitt, near which place, just before General Middleton's arrival, he had engaged Big Bear's forces at Frenchman's Butte. With Riel and Poundmaker prisoners, and Big Bear's band scattered, the active campaign was now over. Otter's Column struck north from Battleford in an effort to intercept Big Bear; but the dispirited old Chief, having left his band in the hope of escaping alone across the border, was captured by the Police near Carlton. The rebellion suppressed, there remained only the journey home of two thousand miles, — this time by 850 miles down the Saskatchewan and across Lake Winnipeg to Selkirk, then by rail and steamer to points farther east.

2nd Printing 1957