

# NORTHWEST REBELLION.

## Col. Denison Throws New Light on the Rising of 1885.

### HOW BATOCHÉ WAS WON

**The Late Colonel Williams' Gallant Dash — Grievances of the Half-breeds — How the Campaign was Promptly Criticized.**

Probably the later chapters of Colonel G. T. Denison's book on "Skiirming in Canada" will be found more interesting to the majority of Canadian readers than those earlier portions of the work noticed in *The Globe* of last Saturday, and more especially the account he gives of the outbreak and suppression of the Northwest rebellion of 1885. Colonel Denison speaks with refreshing candor about the causes which led to the rising of the half-breeds, and is an outspoken critic of the manner in which the campaign was conducted by the militia authorities. He does not mince matters, indeed he writes with the direct bluntness of the soldier rather than with the finesse of the diplomat. Speaking of the outbreak, he says at the outset:—"This was caused by a remarkable instance of departmental inefficiency and obstinacy. A few hundred half-breeds had settled on the south branch of the Saskatchewan River, about twenty-five miles south of Prince Albert, near a point called Batoché's Crossing. Some had been in the neighborhood for many years, and others had moved there from the neighborhood of Fort Garry during the years following the Red River rebellion. Their farms were laid out and fenced, their houses built, and all going on comfortably and prosperously when the Government surveyor came along, insisting on surveying the land on the uniform plan adopted in the unsettled prairies. By this the farms and buildings would have been all mixed up, and great expense and inconvenience caused to the settlers, who had for some years been settled at that point. Representations were made to the department at Ottawa, urging them to make special arrangements to leave these poor people undisturbed in their homes. One can easily understand the horror of the officials of the Department of the Interior at the suggestion that their uniform system of survey should be varied in the slightest degree. Such a breach of red tape regulations could not even be considered, so the complaints became more numerous and the department more obstinate."

#### The Outbreak.

Colonel Denison goes on to say: "The storm burst on March 26, 1885. A party of police from Fort Carlton went to Duck Lake to remove some Government stores. With them were a volunteer company from Prince Albert, consisting of forty men. They were met by a largely superior force of half-breeds, an altercation took place, firing began, and in a few minutes eleven were killed and three wounded. The police had to retreat, the news was flashed to Ottawa, and the Government found an expensive and troublesome campaign on their hands. The whole dispute was over some 40,000 or 50,000 acres of land, in a wilderness of tens of millions of acres for which the Government were crying for settlers. It cost Canada the lives of two hundred of her people, the wounding of many others, the expenditure of about \$6,000,000 in cash, and losses of time and business that cannot be estimated. When it was all over the Government offered free to the volunteers 1,800,000 acres of the land if they wanted to settle on it, and yet the whole dispute was mainly about some red-tape regulations as to surveying some forty or fifty thousand acres of land on which people were already settled. It is not often a country suffers so severely and so unnecessarily."

It will be unnecessary to quote from the author's account of the departure of the troops from Toronto, the circumstances connected with that event being no doubt fresh in the memory of most of our readers. The parts of his narrative which will be read with the most eagerness and curiosity are those that, so to speak, show us behind the scenes of the military theatre. The Colonel himself received orders on April 1 to turn out his corps, the Governor-General's Body Guard, for immediate active service. They started on the 6th in the midst of a heavy rain, late at night. He speaks highly of the personnel of the troop. "My men who served in this affair," he says, "were of a very superior class—many of them well educated and of good social status—most of them in comfortable circumstances. There were doctors, bank clerks, business men, one Oxford graduate, one ex-army officer, etc. They behaved splendidly, keen to obey every order, always willing, and preserving the perfect discipline of zeal and enthusiasm, based upon the common desire of us all to do the very best we could for our country and for the credit of our corps." After giving a vivid account of the hardships of the North Shore trip, the march of thirty-five miles on the ice, and the rough-and-ready manner in which the men had to sleep and eat, Colonel Denison gives his experiences in the journey from Winnipeg to Humboldt. In speaking of the supplies which had been furnished to the cavalry, he rather naively says: "We were issued blankets that had been condemned, in most of which there were holes more or less. I insisted on an extra supply and obtained three for each man, and as the holes were not all opposite one another they were of some use." The water bottles, it appears, all leaked, and were thrown away, the men as soon as they had a chance getting soda water bottles in their place.

#### Napoleon's March Surpassed.

Winnipeg was reached on the 15th of April, exactly eight days after leaving Toronto, during which time the troop had travelled a little more than fifteen hundred miles. "A great deal has been said about the passage of the Alps in 1800," adds the author, "and there is no doubt it was a brilliant strategical operation, but so far as the hardships and difficulties and exposure to the men were concerned I am satisfied that our trip was much the worst. The march of Napoleon's army was perfectly easy by a good carriage road as far as St. Pierre, with every facility for feeding the troops from supplies gathered for weeks beforehand. The only difficult part was from St. Pierre to St. Remy, about fifteen or twenty miles." On arrival at Winnipeg the troop was camped at a place called Mud Flats. Before three days had elapsed one-third of the men were down with rheumatism and bowel disorders, caused by the dampness and cold of the camp. It was not until the Colonel had said he would stand it no longer, after some days of the exposure, that comfortable quarters were found for the men. Winnipeg was left on the 23rd of April, and Humboldt reached on May 1. The Colonel, finding that here he was in an indefensible position, with only ninety men to guard a large quantity of supplies, caused his men to construct rifle

and entrenchments. The news got to him that General Middleton, on hearing of this, ridiculed him for so doing, saying there were no enemies within fifty miles. But as the enemy could have reached him within twelve hours the Colonel thinks he did the right thing. Col. Denison was, however, able from the point at which he was kept stationed to render the General very important service. Subsequently General Middleton discovered that Col. Denison and his men were in a dangerous position, and said, "I am very anxious about Denison. He is in an exposed position. I wish O'Brien was up to reinforce him." Col. Denison managed to get fifty-four teams together, and sent 110,000 pounds of stores up to Batoché with an escort of thirty-five men under his brother, Capt. Clarence Denison, but before the convoy reached its destination the battle of Batoché had been fought, and the rebels had been utterly routed. It is evident from the Colonel's remarks that he would have been much better pleased if he had been in the fighting line instead of having to keep guard over the stores.

Col. Denison devotes some space to paying a tribute to the services of the late Lieut.-Col. Williams. He says:—"There were some strained relations in the camp from various causes. Lieut.-Col. Arthur Williams was the senior officer in the camp next to the Major-General. He was gazetted Lieutenant-Colonel shortly after the Fenian raid, in which he had served. He was an excellent officer, the man whom I had thought for years the best man to have been appointed to the command of the Canadian militia. According to the militia act the General had no power to give any officer a higher rank than that of Lieutenant-Colonel, and Col. Williams was ten years senior to Col. Van Straubensee, and had brought with him from Ontario a splendid regiment four hundred strong. Col. Williams was entitled to the command of the infantry brigade, and should have had it without question, but Williams was a Canadian militiaman, while Col. Van Straubensee had been in the Imperial service in some junior position, and, I understand, formerly knew Gen. Middleton."

#### How Batoché Was Won.

Col. Denison tells a plain story of how Batoché was won. He says:—

"Before the third day's fighting at Batoché was over it seems clear from all I could gather at the time, and by careful inquiry afterward, that there were two cliques or sets among the officers: the General and some of the old army men in one, and the Canadian militia officers who had brought their men upon the ground in the other. The latter saw skirmishing going on, and no hope of any result. They thought the General had no confidence in them—they had very little in him. Their comrades were being killed and wounded every day, and they were indignant at the rumors that regulars had been sent for from Halifax. On the night of the 11th Williams said to some of his comrades: 'The next time I am sent forward to skirmish I will dash right on with the bayonet and end this matter, and I want you to back me up, and this seems to have been agreed upon, as the result proves.'"

General Middleton had arranged for a grand combined attack and had moved out with 150 mounted men to the northeast of Batoché, one gun out one hundred and fifty mounted men to the northeast of Batoché, one gun and the Gatling. As soon as he got into action Col. Van Straubensee was to attack the rifle pits to the south of Batoché. The General, when he reached his position, commenced firing, but Col. Van Straubensee, thinking the firing was not serious enough, did not move his men. The General marched back three or four miles, only to find the main body of his force calmly waiting events. The General's remarks were, it is reported, of a sulphurous description. The General then went to his lunch, and Col. Williams, with about 80 or 90 of his men, and the Grenadiers, about 180 strong, were ordered out to skirmish, as had been done for the previous two days. They were to advance to the old line, and as much farther as they could.

Col. Williams was on the left of the line and the Grenadiers to the right. The position of affairs, Col. Denison relates, was as follows:—

"The General, with Lieut.-Col. Houghton, D.A.G., and therefore second in command, were at lunch. The 90th, the largest corps of the command, were lying about the zareba resting. The artillery were at the zareba, the horses unhitched. Bolton's scouts had their horses on the picket line, unsaddled and feeding; the other two mounted corps in the same position, or, in other words, 250 men were out in front of the enemy, while the main body of the infantry, the artillery and the mounted corps, in all about 650 strong, were about the camp, as unprepared as they could well be."

#### A Gallant Dash.

From Lieut.-Col. Houghton's account of the battle given to Col. Denison, Col. Williams advanced upon the enemy with his men and charged them at the point of the bayonet. They rapidly gained ground and cheered as they advanced. The sound of the cheering reached General Middleton, who, on being informed of what was taking place, ordered reinforcements to the support of Williams and his men. The reinforcements came up in time to join in the final rush. The rebels were forced out of the village and driven back for several miles. The whole force acted practically without orders. General Middleton is reported to have said, "D— them, let them go; you can't stop them."

This coup ended the rebellion. Col. Williams received a good deal of credit in the newspaper reports, but, says Col. Denison, he was in the bad books of the headquarters staff and the army clique after that. He had to submit to nagging and insolence, and there was no one to see justice done to him. Many of the officers of the Midland Battalion seemed to think that Col. Williams was worried into the illness that killed him. He was exposed to cold and wet, and run down from hard work and poor food, and at the last became so weak that he was forced to give up. "He won the campaign," remarks Col. Denison, "and that was his reward. Sir Frederick Middleton obtained the promotion, the K.C.M.G. and \$20,000."

#### Indians Badly Treated.

Col. Denison is severe in his criticism of the treatment Poundmaker and Whitecap received. Poundmaker, as is well known, was attacked on his reserve by Col. Otter, and an engagement ensued in which our troops lost eight men killed and fifteen wounded. Poundmaker was afterwards tried and convicted on evidence, the Colonel says, that "any ordinary trial would have insured his acquittal without the jury leaving the box, but the prejudice against the Indians in the Northwest was so great that he could not get a fair trial. He was sentenced to three years in the penitentiary." The Colonel drew the attention of Sir Alexander Campbell to the injustice that had been done, and Poundmaker was released in the following spring. He also took similar action in the case of Whitecap, who had been arrested, and had the gratification of getting the harmless old man released.

The closing chapters are devoted to some personal matter about General Middleton, to the return of the Body Guard from the west, and to the author's visits to England during the jubilees of 1887 and 1897.

It will be news to the public to hear that when the Princess Louise visited Toronto in 1883 information was obtained that there was a Fenian plot to assassinate or injure her. Extraordinary precautions were taken by Colonel Denison and the Chief of Police to safeguard her, and in consequence her Royal Highness was never in the slightest danger. The Fenian emissaries reported when they got back to New York, the Colonel tells us, that they were unable to get near the Princess because there was such a large crowd of officials who kept about her.