

LORD WOLSELEY'S 'HISTORY'

THE RED RIVER REBELLION

'Oh . . . that mine adversary had written a book!' Lord Wolseley has done this in his old and leisured days and has fallen into the hands of his adversaries. It is strange to us that he has glorified war as about the noblest sport of all—an opinion which was not held by the commanders of such greater eminence as Wellington and the First Napoleon. However, let that pass. To Catholics, Lord Wolseley's shameful and amazing perversion of the story of the Red River Rebellion in Canada has come as a great surprise. We were long familiar with the details of that rising, and our knowledge of it was rendered still more intimate by the stirring narrative which—as we stood by the grave of Louis Riel in St. Boniface, in 1902—was communicated to us by a Canadian participant in the struggle who accompanied Lord Wolseley on the expedition which he so grievously misrepresents in his recently published book.

A Nemesis has, however, got on the track of Lord Wolseley. The Nemesis is Mr. Martin J. Griffin, Parliamentary Librarian of Canada. With all the documents in his possession he tears Lord Wolseley's account of the rising to tatters. His communication appeared in 'The Times Literary Supplement' (London) of Friday, December 4. He says:

All Canadians will read with surprise, many with regret, and not a few with some indignation, the chapter in which Lord Wolseley sums up his recollections of his Canadian career. That career is inseparably connected with the Red River Rebellion of 1870. That rebellion is not yet a part of ancient history. Many are very much alive who took part in it. Most Canadians of middle age remember its details. To all of them the account and the comments of Lord Wolseley will seem inaccurate, unkind and unfair.

To write a controversial chapter after so many years seems to indicate a state of feeling which ought not to exist, or which, if it existed, should have been suppressed. Will you kindly permit me to occupy enough space for a necessarily controversial reply?

In describing the origin of the rebellion at Red River, in 1870, Lord Wolseley, says that the French Canadians of the West were 'ruled over by a clever, cunning, unscrupulous Bishop—a description of

Archbishop Tache

which will hardly be recognised by any one who had the honor of his acquaintance. After so many years it seems odd that Lord Wolseley should retain what seems to be personal animosity towards a man so long honored all over Canada. Lord Wolseley says of the Archbishop that the Hudson Bay Company had 'used him' to keep out settlers—a statement which will certainly be news to the Hudson Bay people as it will be to the friends of Archbishop Tache. As well talk of 'using' Richelleu! Archbishop Tache was so great a man that ordinary human cunning shrank in his presence into fear and awe. He was so wise and powerful a man that he was sent for to Rome in 1870 to try to settle the rebellion. He was so trusted a man that the Governor-General sent for him, and pledged him, 'viva voce' and in writing, the honor of the Crown for any settlement he might be able to make of a disturbance which threatened to be disastrous. To call such a man 'clever, cunning, and unscrupulous' shows a singular want of fitness in the choice of phrases.

Lord Wolseley says that the French Canadians 'saw with envy and dread the steadily increasing power and position of Western Canada,' and wanted 'to create a new French-speaking country westward of the great lakes.' He ignores what ought to be the obvious fact, that, if Bishop Tache was in league with the Hudson Bay Company to keep out settlers, it would not be easy to create a new State. And he does not seem to know that from the moment of its purchase in 1870 the North-West country came under the control of the Federal Government at Ottawa; that Sir John Macdonald was the head of that Government; and that every step taken in regard to the purchase and the government of that country was taken by an Administration in which the French-Canadian Ministers were only three out of thirteen.

No French-Canadian 'wire-pullers,'

as he calls them—as he calls men like Sir George Cartier!—could have prevailed in so sinister a policy against the ability and the strength of the majority of the Cabinet. Had the 'wire-pullers' so prevailed there was Parliament ready to crush all of them.

Lord Wolseley goes on with a high degree of inconsistency to point out how the Government of Canada, in the beginning of the troubles, sent out surveyors to survey the lands of the half-breeds; how the surveyors offended the people by their off-hand manners and ignor-

ance of the French language; and how the half-breed 'very naturally jumped to the conclusion that there was some plot on foot to rob him of the land he occupied and had partially cultivated, but for which he could show no written title.' If the mental attitude of the half-breed was 'very natural' (and why should he welcome his own extinction?), surely we do not need the romantic theory of a French-Canadian conspiracy to account for the rebellion. The conspiracy theory is just

'Fudge!'

With regard to the expedition which Colonel Wolseley was, under General Lindsay, the commanding officer, the narrative is so curiously inexact that my references to it will seem rather tame to those in Canada who do not reflect on the seriousness of using expletives regarding a gentleman holding, so conspicuously, his Majesty's commission. He tells us that the Government were 'not always the easiest people to deal with'—though they placed the whole resources of the country at his disposal. He denounces the 'French-Canadian politicians and their bigoted priests' for exaggerating the 'physical difficulties' in his path—as if such discouragement was of any consequence to a soldier commanding a fully-equipped expedition, largely manned by French-Canadian 'voyagers! He goes on to say that these priests and politicians were 'silly people.' If they were silly they were not dangerous; to denounce them is waste of space. He denounces once more the 'scheming prelate' who was trying to save

Riel, the rebel chief;

but he admits that the prelate failed—even with the 'wire-pullers' at his back, and all his unscrupulousness to back him!

Lord Wolseley tells us that the expedition was economically managed, and that the reason for this was that the whole business was largely under the control of General Lindsay (and Colonel Wolseley?) in Canada, and he makes his comment:—'The Cabinet and the Parliamentary element in the War Office that has marred so many a good military scheme, had, I may say, little or nothing to do with it from first to last. When will civilian Secretaries of State for War cease from troubling in war affairs?'

Now I hold no brief for the War Office, though, having a long and intimate knowledge of Ministerial difficulties, and also of the somewhat peremptory tendency of the military mind, I would gladly do so. For the present I may simply say that in this particular instance Lord Wolseley's oblique attack is singularly wanting in discretion. There never was a more purely civilian affair than the Red River Rebellion of 1870. It originated with agriculturists and hunters. It was legislated for by a civilian Administration. The expedition was half volunteers. The whole business of the expedition to the very last detail was planned and carried out by Mr. Simon Dawson, a civilian; by Mr. Lindsay Russell, a civilian; by the Hudson Bay officers, all civilians; and by the Public Works Department at Ottawa, a hopelessly civilian organisation. The only serious troubles that arose during the expedition resulted when the inexperienced military chief gave orders contrary to the advice of the experienced civilians—as, for example, when he sent huge boats up stony rapids when a road was ready at hand; or when, owing to the allowance of only 'military rations' to the horses many were rendered useless. There was, indeed, a short, gloomy period when, in consequence of the departure of the Indians, and the discontent of the voyageurs at the useless labor imposed on them by the military chief, the expedition seemed doomed to failure. It was

Saved by Civilian Energy

and civilian knowledge.

Lord Wolseley exaggerates the military character of the expedition. This was all very well when he was only publishing a pleasing address to the troops; it is out of place now. The fact is that the rebellion originated with a demagogue and a few farmers. It was suppressed by a military picnic. There was no fighting. The demagogue fled. The farmers were found in their fields. The route over which Lord Wolseley passed, though stiff enough for a large force with much weight to carry, had been for two centuries the highway of French commerce and communication. The exploit of passing over it was not heroic or classic, though Lord Wolseley talks of the Romans.

When the whole affair was over Lord Wolseley was so impressed with the value of the country that he asked Sir John Macdonald to appoint him to the Governorship. Sir John and Sir George Cartier refused. It was indeed a fortunate refusal. Had Lord Wolseley succeeded in getting the position he would have been ruined. It was fortunate in another way. Had he been appointed to govern a people about whose race and religion, bishops and priests he entertains such curious opinions, there would have had to be another expedition—to rescue Lord Wolseley.