

Louis Riel's Petition to President Cleveland:

UNITED STATES CONSULATE,

Winnipeg, September 1, 1885. (Received September 17.)

SIR: Enclosed is a petition of Louis Riel to the President.
I forward the original, thinking that such a course may be expected under the
circumstances.

I am, sir, your obedient servant,

JAMES W. TAYLOR.

(Inclosure in dispatch NO. 441 at Winnipeg.)

Petition of Louis Riel to the President.

Jesus, sanvez nous.
Marie, intercedez pour nous.
Joseph, priez pour nous.

[NOTE.-Above on first page, reverse page blank.]

To His Excellency - CLEVELAND.
President of the United States and to His Excellency's Cabinet,

Mr. PRESIDENT: The undersigned, your humble petitioner, a foreigner by birth, became American citizen about the 16th day of March, 1883, at Helena, Lewis and Clark County, Montana.

He is a native of the North-West Territory, in British North America. He has the honor to submit that the British Government gave, two hundred years ago, to a company of adventurers, the monopoly of the fur trade in the North-West, thereby depriving the North-West of its right and of the advantages of trading with the world and depriving the world of its right and of the benefits of trading with the North-West.

That the giving out of such a monopoly over the North-West left that country, new as it was, altogether at the mercy of the Hudson's Bay Company; the more so that, from its having been constituted at first as a magistrature over its own servants, the same company was made, in the course of time, by imperial authority, to grow up as the government of the North-West.

That this measure kept the North-West confined to a strict “blocus” during six or seven generations; was a cause of continual calamity to the Territory itself; of damage to the adjoining countries, and an insult as well as an injustice to the world at large.

And that having been resorted to without reason whatever, consequently without justice at all, it constitutes the British Government guilty of an extraordinary crime against humanity.

The undersigned your humble petitioner, submits that therefore the British Government have forfeited long ago all title and right of governing the North-West.

The undersigned has the honor to submit that in '69 the Ottawa government envying the lands of the North-West, bought them (so to speak of the transaction) from the Hudson's Bay Company, which did not own them; that the Hudson Bay requested one-twentieth of the Territory for the perpetration of the sale, and was granted it; that the transaction, all against probity, as it was, received the sanction of the British Government, and was carried out under its careful attention; that in so doing the British Government replaced the oppressive calamitous fur-trade monopoly by one completely ruinous, as it gave the Hudson's Bay Company a still greater hold on the resources of the country than before, and as it established the government of another colony and of different interest master of the whole land and at liberty to dispose of it, as of its own soil as of its own property, without advantages in return, without any compensation.

That the Dominion began immediately to survey the North-West, to cut the old surveys and ignore them, to cut roads through private properties;

That the Canadian surveyors at that work were soldiers under disguise and numbering some four or five hundred;

That the Dominion having at the same time in view to usurp the rule of the North-West, made up a group of men, gathered from the vicinity of Ottawa, furnished that group with five hundred carbines, called it the North-West Council, exported it, and attempted to seat it at the Fort Garry, when the five hundred surveyors turned out to be a squadron of militia;

That the Hudson's Bay Company endeavored then to hand over to the invaders that government of the North-West which England had so constantly neglected and so obstinately kept at the disposal of trading adventurers;

That the people of the North-West resisted energetically the Hudson's Bay Company's iniquitous designs and the Ottawa dreadful scheme, and never failed to dignify the defense of their cause with expressions of loyalty to England;

That the British Government answered their magnanimous fidelity by promptly appointing as governor of the North-West the Ottawa governor himself-that is to say, the very man in the empire whose position, whose advisers, and consequently whose whole

interest were more certainly against the North-West; appointment conspicuously partial and unjust, which threw at once all the chances on the strongest side, in oppressing the weak as much as possible;

That the British Government then left the North-West without administration, exposed to the many perils of anarchy and invasion;

The undersigned, your humble petitioner, submits and respectfully claims that by committing this other remarkable series of outrages against the North-West, the British Government have again forfeited all title and right of governing it;

Your humble petitioner submits that the people of the North-West, left to themselves, had to organize and to constitute a state of their own, to take care of public affairs, and for their protection;

That the honorable William McTavish, then still governor, in name, of the North-West, having been asked by a convention of the people's representatives if he could approve of the new state, entreated them to push on their work; and his answer to the Hon. John Sutherland and Mr. Frazer, the two members waiting on him, was "For God's sake, form a government."

That when the convention sat, Hon. John Black, governor ad interim and judge of the H. B. Company, was one of the members elected by the people and consented to act as chairman of the convention;

That the people's representatives, numbering forty, being in session at Fort Garry, then formed a government and elected your humble petitioner as its highest employee, February 11, 1870;

That more than two-thirds, thirty-two out of the forty, voted the new government into existence and elected; your humble petitioner at the head of it;

That the eight other members were in favor to that extent that they abstained from offering any opposition;

That immediately after, Hon. Judge Black, H.B. Company governor ad interim and chairman of the convention, left his seat and gave it courteously to the president of the provisional government, according to the convention's vote;

That, on the same occasion, Hon. John Black, H. B. Company's governor ad interim and judge, having been chosen by the president of the North-West as one of the delegated to Ottawa, accepted the appointment, with the company's approval;

That some days later the Hon. D. A. Smith, a commissioner sent by the governor-general to the North-West, went in company with Reverend Archdeacon McLean, now Bishop of the Saskatchewan, and persuaded the districts whose eight representatives had remained

neutral to join and to acknowledge your humble petitioner as president of the provisional government; and Hon. D. A. Smith's advice having been acceded to, the undersigned, your humble petitioner, received then the unanimous support of the people.

As a result the new state of the North-West, in '70; its government were legally constituted and the election of its president was carried out according to regular constitutionality.

Your humble petitioner respectfully submits that as soon as the new state was organized; its government formed, and its president elected, four commissioners, Reverend J. B. Thibault, Vicar-General, Colonel de Salaberry, Hon. D. A. Smith, and his lordship, Archbishop Tache, appointed by the Crown, invited the undersigned to send delegates to Ottawa, and there to negotiate the terms of the federal pact between the East and the North-West.

That such invitation was a recognition by the Crown itself, of the state, of the government, and of the president of the North-West. Your humble petitioner submitted, that he appointed in his official capacity a delegation according to the repeated and pressing invitation received; that his delegates proceeded to Ottawa were received by the Crown on his credentials and admitted to treat on his instructions, which was another irrecusable official recognition of the state, of the government, and of the president of the North-West; by whom: By the Crown.

Your humble petitioner respectfully submits that his delegates having, at the outset, set forth that they could not begin to treat without the guarantee of a general and complete amnesty, and having required it as a condition, sine qua non the Vice-King of Canada answered most favorably that the Crown was going, for certain and sure, to amnesty all the past troubles, after the conclusion of the treaty, and that the federal regime in the North-West would be inaugurated by the proclamation of that amnesty complete and general. And the governor-general, Lord Lisgar gave his Vice-Kingly parole as security. A third very positive recognition by the Crown of the state, of the government, and president of the North-West.

The undersigned, your humble petitioner, respectfully submits that his lordship, Archbishop Tache, then appointed by the governor-general of Canada as pacifier of the North-West gave your humble petitioner his official word of honor that, that amnesty in question would be proclaimed at the time specified; that ill at the very opening of confederation in the North-West;

That the archbishop owed his commission as much to the pleasure of the British Government as to the governor-general's choice; consequently, besides being a fourth remarkable recognition of the state government and president of the North-West, his word of honor is the word of honor not only of the governor-general but of the British Government itself concerning the sine qua non condition of amnesty.

Your humble petitioner could here review the whole treaty as it took place: point out the

many ways in which it has been broken; and show by facts that the present government of Manitoba and of the North-West is a perfect chaos of illegality, unconstitutionality, and arbitrary legislation; but for the sake of brevity will confine to the one article of the stipulations on which the breach of faith has been acknowledged and established beyond all possibility of discussion and doubt.

The undersigned has the honor to refer your excellency and your most honorable ministers (1) to a pamphlet entitled "Amnesty," written by Archbishop Tache in the year 1874, whereby his lordship proves his commission, his limited instructions, his word of honor, and that such word of honor has been repudiated by the Crown.

(2) To the report of a committee appointed by the house of commons of Canada, in the year 1874, for the purpose of enquiring into the causes of the North-West troubles and the reasons which had delayed the proclamation of amnesty; wherein more than a dozen of highly respectable witnesses prove that an amnesty general and complete has been guaranteed and that it has not been fulfilled.

(3) To a series of resolutions adopted by the Canadian government in '75 read during the session, on or about the 12th of February and endorsed by a large majority of the house of commons, such resolutions showing with all conclusiveness that the general and complete amnesty in question had not, only been promised and guaranteed, but that it had even been made a sine qua non condition of alliance with the North-West.

Your humble petitioner respectfully calls, however, your excellency's and cabinet's attention to the fact that the Hon. A. Mackenzie, then premier of Canada, his whole ministry and his large majority in the house, instead of logically concluding petitioning the Queen to fulfill the promise, the Vice-Kingly parole, the word of honor, the condition sine qua non of the amnesty general and complete on the North-West troubles, committed the fault of continuing and perpetuating the breach of faith.

I. By decreeing against your petitioner a banishment of five years.

II. By offering my adjutant-general, A. D. Lepine, the alternative of a banishment for the same period of time or the loss of his political rights forever.

III. By issuing themselves an amnesty to the rest of the North-West people, such an amnesty being in itself a mockery of justice; in the first place because the secretary of the Dominion war but the secretary of a mere colony and had DO more sovereign power to amnesty us than the North-West would have had to amnesty Canada; and in the second place, the provocation having come from Ottawa, the fact of an unjust aggressor amnestying his victim was nothing else but the height of injury, and may be taken as the worst of our grievances against the Federal Government. The Imperial authorities have allowed all this to take place while perfectly aware of the outrage.

N. B.-In '69, during the month of December, Lord Granville, minister of the colonies, in one of his dispatches to the governor-general, accuses the Dominion government of having been a cause of troubles in the North-West.

N. B.-And the Dominion committed these wrongs against us; after having officially confessed that we were in the right, as can be seen by the following: In the same month

of December, '69, Hon. Joseph Howe, secretary of state for Canada, states plainly in a dispatch to Hon. W. McDougall, concerning the way he (McDougall) and Col. S. Dennis had acted in the North-West; that they had compelled the people of that Territory to form a government of their own; that such a government on account of the circumstances and of necessity was legal; that the responsibility of the troubles, even the shedding of blood, if it took place, rested on the Canadian government's officials, and bitterly complains of their imprudence and temerity.

N. B.-In the month of MAY, 1870, Sir George E. Cartier, one of the ministers who had treated with my delegates and minister of militia for Canada, acknowledges in memorandum to the Crown that the Canadian government have caused the North-west troubles, and that the people of that Territory had only kept on the defensive.

Thus the reasons which England and the Dominion have given afterwards to try and justify their not complying with, and their derogating from, the treaty obligations, will never amount to anything else than pretextus.

Your humble petitioner respectfully submits to your excellency and cabinet the following as the prominent fact of the whole situation-the sine qua non condition of an alliance with the North-West, the general and complete amnesty has not been fulfilled. Consequently the British Government has had neither the right of introducing the confederation in the North-West, as they did in 1870, neither the right of maintaining it there since.

Consequently, that confederation which the British Government supports between Lake Superior and the Rocky Mountains is an immense fraud and a dreadful tyranny.

Consequently, again, the state and the government of the North-West are mine, such as they were entrusted to me by the people's voice, at Fort Garry, the 11th of February, 1870, and such as recognized to me by the four commissioners of the Crown who have invited me to treat, and by the Crown itself, which has treated with my delegates through the Vice-King of Canada.

Your humble petitioner begs leave to submit that he has a right to denounce the breach of faith in so important a matter, to reject the pact which England has made with him and she has never fulfilled, now principally, that your humble petitioner has been persecuted, has exhausted all means and patiently waited during the long period of fifteen years, principally now that, instead of executing her obligations toward me, England is trying to execute me.

Before God and before men, the undersigned, your humble petitioner, declares his native land free, and has the honor to ask your excellency and most honorable minister for the advantage of annexing the North-West to the Great American Republic.

Your humble petitioner respectfully asks, as American citizen, for your kind and powerful protection. In the event of your excellency and most honorable cabinet granting my request as American citizen, I, the undersigned, have the honor to ask that the

international line between the United States and the North-West be blotted out from Lake Superior to the Pacific Ocean, that the Hon. James W. Taylor, United States consul, at Winnipeg, be appointed governor-general of those vast territories and with the merciful help of God's providence, if such would be the disposition of your good will and the favor of your government, I, the undersigned, humbly ask you to appoint me as first minister and secretary of the North-West under Hon. James W. Taylor.

Your humble petitioner respectfully submits that he has no ill will whatever against his enemies; that his great wish is to save his friends and as well to better, all he can, the condition of those against him. Therefore I respectfully submit that, in the case of such a providential event, your excellency and most honorable ministers may be pleased to introduce and inaugurate the United States institutions in the grand North-West, without changing, for the present, the local officials and employees of all sorts, so as to avoid a commotion; so as to satisfy and please all classes and all parties and so as to secure more surely the success of the national institutions in this large portion of the world, for the glory of your administration, and for the happiness of this my native land.

Your humble petitioner thanks your Excellency and your government for the good they have already so generously conferred upon him. I have the honor to be, of your Excellency and of your cabinet, the very respectful and humble servant and petitioner.

LOUIS "DAVID" RIEL.



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