

**NARRATIVE OF THE
FENIAN INVASION
OF CANADA**

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ALEXANDER SOMERVILLE

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PREFACE.

The term Fenian is derived from the Irish word Feins, the genitive case of Fian (plural Fiana), the designation of a band, or rather several bands of warriors, whose duty was to defend the coasts of Ireland from foreign invasion.

The Fians, Fiana, or Fenians flourished in the third century of our era, and employed their time alternately in war, the chase, and the cultivation of poetry. As their protecting power extended to part of Scotland, hence the traditions of them in that country, on which M'Pherson's celebrated poems of 'Ossian' are founded. Their chief was Fin or Fionn (the Fingal of Macpherson), and their most celebrated bards were Ossian, or Oislin, and Fergus (sons of Fin), and Dafre, sometimes called Gunire.

James Stephens, who claims to be originator of Fenianism, was born at Kilkenny, Ireland, in 1827. He was probably familiar with the agrarian disturbances around Kilkenny in the years 1842-43. While it falls to me in the year 1886 to write this, "Narrative of the Fenian Invasion of Canada," and to deplore, deplore, denounce it, so it fell to me in the years 1843 and 1844, when vindicating the rights of industry against injustice to produce a work, "A Cry from Ireland" of which the late Daniel O'Connell spoke thus at a public meeting in Dublin, afterwards, nearly in the same words, in London:

"The impartial, vivid descriptions of the wrongs of Irish industry and sufferings of the tenantry at Bennet's Bridge, by Alexander Somerville, are all the more emphatic that he is neither an Irishman, a catholic, nor a repealer. To him more than to any individual we owe the commission of Inquiry into the operation of the Laws of Landlord and Tenant. This work of Mr. Somerville which I hold in my hand (and from which he had cited passages) will be read by generations of Irishmen yet unborn."

On February 14th. 1844, Sir Robert Peel, then Prime Minister, having announced that a commission of Inquiry was to be sent to Ireland, Lord John Russell, leader of the opposition, made a speech of which this is a passage: "Government have appointed a commission for farther inquiry into the subject. I doubt whether farther evidence be necessary seeing how much evidence we already have upon it, and see statements in the book by Alexander Somerville, '*A Cry from Ireland*' of a heart rending kind; statements which I would not venture to refer to unless they were fully ascertained to be true; statements which show that with the powers of the law, and in name of the law, some landlords in Ireland, are exercising a fearful and a dreadful power."

The Prime Minister said in the same debate: "The noble lord has referred to a book called *A Cry from Ireland*. Sir, I have read that work, and I think it is impossible for any man whatever to read it without being shocked with the manner in which landlords, as there described, have in many instances perverted their powers for harsh purposes."

Extract from the evidence of Patrick Ring, one of seventy and odd tenant farmers on the Bennet's Bridge estate near Kilkenny, for some of whom I obtained justice and re-instatement in the lands from which they had been evicted. *Commission Blue Books, Reports to both Houses of Parliament, 1844; Vol. III, p. 363.* [See also "Somerville's Book of a Diligent Life in the Service of Public Safety in Britain," published by John Lovell, St. Nicholas Street, Montreal.]

Patrick Ring, examined before the Royal Commission at Kilkenny, Oct. 8,

1844: "There was a gentleman came over to Ireland of the name of Somerville. He had heard of my case and how I was persecuted. He hired a car and went out to Bennet's Bridge, and got up to the place and saw my mother out in the ruins with an infant in her arms, after she had come out from the mother [his wife] striving to mind the mother and to mind the child. They [family of children] were in a famishing way; and he saw her and left her [a sum of money was named but misprinted]. He brought me into Kilkenny and he kept me at Flude's Hotel taking down my case two days and a night. I told him I was going to Dublin and he gave me money and clothes, and then he took me to Dublin, and he got my case put in the *Morning Chronicle* in London, and he laid it also before Mr. O'Connell" &c.

Extract of a letter from Patrick Ring written from Bennet's Bridge, Kilkenny, 4th. Oct. 1844 to Alexander Somerville in London: "My Dear Sir. I take the liberty of writing to you as I know I am welcome, hoping to find you and your dear mistress, my best friend on earth, well, as this leaves me and my family at present. Them all is recovered from the fever, and you next to God was the means of it, you and your dear mistress."

In the famine years I was again sent to Ireland by the proprietors of the *Manchester Examiner*, and on behalf of benevolent persons in England, to trace the courses of the pestilence. Some Irish newspapers and many clergymen catholic and protestant hailed my presence in the country warmly. On my sending to England reports of villages or districts which were especially distressed benevolent persons and societies forwarded money to catholic priests and others whom I named as persons to be entrusted with funds for the relief of the perishing people.

In 1848, I was, with an artist, the representative of the *Illustrated London News*, sent to Ireland to describe the progress of Smith O'Brien's insurrection.

These matters are here referred to merely to indicate that, although a Scotchman, I am familiar with the social condition of Ireland; that although bred only to the plough with but small education in schools, almost none, for I was working in the fields at seven years of age to assist in obtaining, as one of a large and poor family a scanty subsistence, I yet had the power and the privilege, as a public writer employed in England, occasionally visiting Ireland, to give material assistance, and obtain redress for oppressed tenants in that district, which owns James Stephens as a native, and which has inspired him with Fenianism. My life has been a battle, and my battle has been the rights of man. Not to pull down, but to build up. My writings have been for a space of thirty or more years, directed to the development of a conservative science, teaching, not alone as Political Economy in its heartless divorcement from human sympathies, has taught, how to produce and accumulate insensate matter as public wealth, but how to diffuse as well as produce in complete abundance the stores of wealth among the producers; and how, among all the people of a nation, to dispense the elements of human happiness.

"Ireland for the Irish." What would have been done with Richard Shea, the tyrant landlord of Bennet's Bridge, who in 1841, '42, '43, had 247 lawsuits with his tenantry, who by his defiance of justice and of law, yet by the power of the law, had brought the district into a condition of agrarian convulsion? He was an Irishman of ancient lineage, boasted of being descended from the kings of Munster? What of him, and such as he, in expelling the Saxon and giving Ireland to the Irish.

But standing on this land of Canada in presence of a Fenian invasion, recently attempted, again threatened, and possibly to be repeated before these sheets are dry from the press, the mind which has with long fidelity pleaded for the rights of Irish industry, for justice to Irish tenant farmers, revolts against dis-

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cession of such questions now. The people of this Province, reclaiming the wilderness, creating property, building up a country, a social fabric, and desiring to enjoy what they are toiling to establish, what have they done that Irishmen, in the United States, in name of the wrongs of seven centuries, should invade them? Most of them were in their own persons, or in the persons of their fathers, poor, hard-working laborers in England, Scotland, Ireland, before coming to Canada to toil. My forefathers lost their land in Scotland by political revolutions as many in Ireland have. Three-fourths of all the Scotch in this Province came here for the same reason that the Irish came, because they were landless at home, and doomed to lives of toil at small wages, sometimes to the pressure of famine prices on food, while, in vain, they

Begged some brother of the earth
To give them leave to toil.

And English laborers came to Canada to do battle for fortune and subdue the wilderness, for the same reasons and with similar objects in view as the Irish and Scotch. So also the French of an older day, and the Germans and Dutch.

American Republicans. We are not ignorant of political freedom. As a people, we in Canada, warmly, earnestly sympathized with you in your great war of four years, waged to conserve your nationality, to vindicate legitimate government, and the laws against rebellion, (see chapter eight of this Narrative). We possess freedom in the widest amplitude; religious, political, civic, social, industrial. We venerate what is old in the British Constitution, which being at the same time youthful, vigorous and easily adapted to new circumstances, is favorable to stability, public morality, social safety, general happiness.

And the people here will stand by the political constitution and laws of Canada and by their allegiance to the British Empire, loving you not the less, trusting to live side by side with you in all the harmony of people inheriting and enjoying a kindred freedom; but resolved before Heaven and in the name of Almighty God to defend this freedom, and this country.

As I have presumed to comment on persons and occurrences in the following Narrative, it may be proper to say that in youth I had considerable experience in a field of war, and as a writer have often had occasion to advert to the subject of national defences. A military education of the manhood of Great Britain, was, to my pen a frequent theme.

Letter from Lord Stanley, M. P., late Secretary of State for the Colonies; afterwards Secretary of State for India, and now, 1866, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, dated London, May 12, 1863, to Alexander Somerville, Hamilton, Canada West, acknowledging receipt of "Somerville's Diligent Life in the Service of Public Safety," and "Canada a Battle Ground." (About latter work see chapter eight of this Narrative). Extract: "Your life and writings have long been known to me. I remember on the occasion of some military debate, your name being appealed to. I think it was when the Militia Bill was in question, and the laudatory reference made to you by Lord Palmerston, was received with general applause by the House of Commons."

The late Right Hon. Sidney Herbert, Secretary of State for War, House of Commons, 1860: "Somerville was a man of great ability. He wrote remarkably well, and in after life raised himself to a good social position."

"If we did know the earnest nature of the man, some of the statements in this remarkable book might be set down as the figments of a diseased brain. But truth, unsullied truth, we know to be, as it ever has been the rule and guide of Alexander Somerville." G. P. Ure, *Montreal Family Herald*, 1860.

"I know nothing in our literature which, for graphic narrative and picturesque description of men and things surpasses some of the Letters of the Whistler at

the Plough, written by Alexander Somerville." Richard Cobden, M. P., 1847. (On the question of national defences Mr. Cobden and I parted company never to meet again.)

For three years, 1835-38, the Foreign Enlistment Act was suspended in Britain to permit an auxiliary Legion to serve under the Queen of Spain. I do not cite this matter as approving of the policy, but to say that I, with 20,000 more, induced by the cry of constitutional liberty, and full of young life and enterprise, was there. About 5000 survived the hardships of campaigning in a wooded, mountainous country and the casualties of seven general engagements (allied with the Spanish army), and numerous smaller actions such as that at Limestone Ridge on 2nd of June 1838. We were before an active enemy always. In that time I learned something, and suffered some, as bullet wounds and premature disability bear witness now. But it does not follow that because a man has been in a fight or many fights, that therefore he is a sound military critic. Every man is not a hero who is wounded or killed, though a generous courtesy confers on the killed and wounded that high distinction. I do not profess to be an infallible authority. But in the matter of the Niagara frontier campaign, claim to have been careful in research, in collecting and collating evidence. And no inducement under heaven would lead me to write what I do not believe to be true. A literary experience of more than a quarter of a century has made me familiar with many subjects. I adduce a few extracts from military certificates, relating to services before the enemy. The first is from General Sir De Lacy Evans, G. C. B., thirty-four years M. P. for the City of Westminster. He commanded 2nd Division in the Crimea, 1854-65, and before serving in Spain, 1835-37, had seen more active and arduous service in India, Portugal, Spain, France, America than almost any living contemporary.

"Bryanstone Square, London, Nov. 7th, 1847.

(Extract), "MR. SOMERVILLE—SIR, I should be wanting in every feeling of justice were I to hesitate, under the circumstances referred to, in bearing my unqualified testimony to your brave, zealous, useful and exemplary conduct while serving in the Auxiliary Legion under my orders in Spain. The position you filled in that service, was no sinecure. The reports respecting your conduct and character were uniformly to your credit and honor.

(Signed)

"DE LACY EVANS, Lieut. General."

No. 2. From Colonel Gilbert Hogg, K. S. F. (Knight of San Fernando) now, 1866, chief of constabulary county of Stafford, England. "I have much pleasure in stating that the conduct of color-sergeant Alexander Somerville, late of 8th. Highlanders, British Auxiliary Legion, was such as to merit my most unqualified approbation. His name was forwarded by me with others to the General of Division as worthy the notice of His Excellency the Lieutenant General for gallantry before the enemy. I might stop here were it not that justice demands I should state more fully the character of this individual. I have a perfect recollection of a mutiny at St. Sebastian in the different Scotch corps [this related to the period of enlistment]. On that occasion as on others the conduct of sergeant Somerville was conspicuous and deserved the highest praise. He never neglected his duty, and ever evinced a desire to secure order and good conduct among the men where his influence was considerable. On the line of march he was enabled from his powerful bodily strength, to bear the fatigue with comparative ease; and at the halt his exertions were unceasing in promoting the comforts and providing for the wants of the men. His conduct naturally attracted my particular notice and I have satisfaction in now recording it, Gilbert Hogg, Colonel, late commanding 8th. Highlanders, B. A. L. of Spain.

"Given under my hand and seal this 26th. day of February 1841. Gilletstown House, Strokestown, County Roscommon, Ireland."

The more a soldier knows of service before an enemy, not alone the service of battle, siege, or skirmish; not so much these, as the life of rough campaigning, marching hurriedly, eating irregularly, often long without sustenance, sleeping in the open air on the ground, doing duty on outlying pickets, penetrating the enemy's lines as scouts, escorting stores through perilous obstacles,—the more a soldier knows of these trials of strength and health, of mind and body, the more he realizes the cardinal truth, that not alone are firearms and ammunition guardians of his life. His overcoat and blanket; his water canteen; his haversack to carry food, kettles to cook food, are, by many possible chances of fortune his life preservers rather than his arms and ammunition. But the whole are to him a unity, inseparable. Without a part of the whole he dies. To see the Militia Volunteers of Canada after three or more years of organization, and after nearly twelve months of special training for active frontier service, going forth upon a campaign with almost none of the necessary equipments to preserve health, life, efficiency as they went on the 1st. of June 1866, was to me, who had gone through such mind-killing, body-killing service as is indicated in the two military certificates, deplorable, astounding. I wrote in the public journals, fervently, strongly. But that fault, that condition of alarm, does not now remain. Though not in all respects equipped, the volunteers are in a condition for service creditable to the military executive officers.

This is how I came to be the writer of the present Narrative; On Sunday, 3rd of June, when the citizens of Hamilton arose in the same condition of feverish disquiet in which they subsided from the streets for a brief space after midnight—not to sleep, for few sleepers lay in Hamilton on the night of 2nd of June, an adjourned meeting from Saturday was held in the Court House. A committee of the principal ladies and gentlemen of the city was there to arrange for sending provisions, medicines, surgical appliances, medical gentlemen and nurses to the front. The character of the previous days occurrences was not known beyond the fact that there had been an engagement and that the enemy had retreated, yet that the volunteers who had beaten them in fight had also retreated, and were reported by Lt.-Col Booker as "demoralized."

The Committee requested the City clergymen present to offer prayers in their churches for the men at the front, and sent me as a fit person to go to the Niagara and Lake Erie frontier to ascertain and report fully without fear or favor what was the real condition of the 13th, and the state of the campaign. All agreed that any news, if true, no matter how calamitous, was better than the horrible suspense which convulsed and clouded the whole city.

I was to cross the country, some thirty miles with a team of fast horses and a guide, as no trains were supposed to be on the track it being Sunday. But there was in preparation a special train which left at 1,30 p. m. I waited and went on it.

At Grimsby at 2,10 p. m. intelligence was given of Colonel Booker having passed on his way to Hamilton. I inferred that excessive zeal for the good of his battalion, nothing to the contrary in his conduct or character being known to me, had induced the journey to urge up provisions and field equipments. Yet the fact of his leaving his command before the enemy also suggested itself as inexplicable. I assert with all the emphasis which language admits, that I expected to have good reports to make of Colonel Booker's eminent military services, until dismal specks discolored the floating rumours that were met about the Welland Railway. At Port Colborne, on the platform, up the street, along the canal wharf, everywhere that day and next day statements were pressed on me both by Hamilton and Toronto volunteers. I hesitated to believe; questioned, cross questioned, sifted, and still doubted, until many refused to re-

ply farther, alleging that I seemed not to believe anything they said implicating Colonel Booker.

This gentleman's name and conduct fills too much of the Narrative. But in the mismanagement of the action of June 2nd; in the subsequent aspersions thrown on the 13th. battalion by Lt-Col. Booker, and in the prominence through a concatenation of circumstances, given to the combat at Limestone Ridge, as the crisis of the short, prompt, decisive campaign, the reputation of the 13th. battalion; the good name of Hamilton city which sent it forth to the fight; the reputation of the Queen's Own, of Toronto city which gave them to the service; of the York and Caltonia Rifles; of the Province of Canada whose sons they were a sample of—all were injuriously affected through Lt-Col. Booker, unless the facts would bear proof that his misconduct was only personal. I have proved that, beyond farther cavil, the volunteers engaged at Limestone Ridge were brave alike, and alike deserving of a historical good name in the present day, and in time to come. To establish this on incontestible grounds I have made many journeys, questioned many persons, balanced conflicting statements, and incurred an unprofitable delay in getting this work before the public; a delay without financial recompense to me as an author, but favorable to the main object which I had in view, a vindication of the Militia Volunteers of Canada.

Animadversions are freely made in the Narrative on the reprehensible inadequacy of equipments with which the volunteers went upon service in June. While the body of this work was in the press the incompleteness continued, so also the remarks of censure; but the Militia authorities have now, (end of August, first and second weeks of September) proved that, while they have had difficulties almost insuperable to overcome, the obstacles are in greater part surmounted.

Almost insuperable? What were the obstacles? A factious opposition waged against the organization of an efficient defensive force of Militia, carried on under the delusive cry of economy, from the year 1862, when the Militia organization by Colonel Lysons, Her Majesty's military representative, was frustrated until the present season of Fenian Invasion, 1866.

Intelligence which lately arrived from Britain informs Canada that the new conservative government, under the Earl of Derby, comprehends and will act on the knowledge of a just conservative philosophy, which Canadian political men calling themselves conservative would have done well to have anticipated during the four years of American war and since. For they have by themselves and their newspaper organs, during the four years of horrible civil war, cultivated international asperities, which are now ripened to a bitter American hatred of Canada, under which, and only under which, Fenian invasions of British America became possible.

On 23rd of July, 1866, Lord Stanley, (son of the Earl of Derby), the new Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, being questioned by Mr. White, a non-official member of the House of Commons, on the Fenian Invasion of Canada in June, and reminded of the just, honorable, effectual interference of the United States government to prevent a more formidable Fenian incursion than that which happened, replied thus:

"I agree in the opinion which the honorable member has expressed as to the friendly and honorable feeling that has been shown by the United States with regard to this Fenian affair. I am very anxious, if possible, and I can speak for my colleagues as well as myself, to do anything that is reasonably possible to remove any ill-feeling of irritation or soreness which may remain in consequence of circumstances connected with the late war." Her Majesty's speech at the prorogation of parliament; and subsequently the Prime Minister's speech at a London banquet, expressed similar sentiments.

INVASION OF CANADA.

CHAPTER I.

Outlines of Strategy as arranged by General Sweeny, Fenian Commander in Chief.—Personality of Colonel O'Neil.

THE plan of the invasion of Canada at the end of May, 1866, was given by the Fenian military commander, General Sweeny, to his followers somewhat thus :

The advance to be made simultaneously from points along the American frontier from St. Albans in Vermont, to Chicago in Illinois, on a sinuous frontage line of fifteen hundred miles. The right wing was at St. Albans and to the eastward. The centre at Malone, State of New York, situated at about fifteen miles inland from the St. Lawrence river, and having railway facilities to concentrate men and supplies from the wide interior of the States, and to distribute them to selected positions on the frontier opposite Canada. Malone was considered available for a landing at Cornwall, the lower outlet of the Upper Canada section of the St. Lawrence canals. Also for an attack on Prescott from Ogdensburg. The occupation of Prescott was to include the severing of the Grand Trunk railway, and to give possession of the branch line to Ottawa city, seat of the Canadian Government. Malone was available also for an expedition to Montreal by way of the Richelieu river. That expedition was also to co-operate with Spears' force crossing the Missisquoi frontier line, both marching with artillery within easy supporting distance of each other.

Murphy and Heffernan were to cut the Lachine and Beauharnois canals; while Spears destroyed the Grand Trunk at several points, including Longueil, opposite Montreal, St. Hilaire, and St. Hyacinthe.

Kingston was to be threatened from Cape Vincent and Ogdensburg, both within easy supporting distance from Malone, by a body of two or three thousand men, who were merely to keep moving, advancing and retir-