

The Law Must Be Supreme.

Riot and bloodshed in Winnipeg on Saturday are being followed by attempts on the part of all concerned to "pass the buck." "Somebody else did it," "Some one else was to blame," is the story all down the line. The rioters complain that the police fired without warning; although they, the rioters, were where they were in defiance of law, and destroying, or aiding and abetting in destroying private property, the protection of which is the first reason for organized society and for the existence of a police force. The loss of life and injuries suffered are deeply regrettable; but the persons injured have themselves to blame. They deliberately challenged constituted authority — and got the worst of it.

All the loss of life and all the serious injuries suffered were the result of a volley fired by the mounted police patrol. For these losses the authorities under whom the police acted are responsible. If the action of the police was within the law there is no more to be said. If it was not within the law whoever was responsible should be punished.

The mayor makes a statement that shots were fired by the mob. The casualty list did not indicate anything of the kind. The police and their horses were injured by pieces of brick or of mortar; not by gunshots. The gunshot wounds were all suffered by the rioters. The mob dispersed as soon as the shots were fired, and there was no more shooting. There is no doubt therefore that the mob was unarmed, so far as military weapons were concerned. They had assembled in response to a call for a peaceful parade, therefore it was not likely that they came armed. The first press despatch gave no suggestion that there was any shooting before the police fired their volley. The conclusion seems inevitable that the mayor is misstating the facts in order to protect both himself and the mounted police.

From the later statements made it seems to be established that the unhorsed policeman was not at any time in actual danger from the mob. That in fact he was taken under the special protection of a leading member of the mob, and that no one laid hands on him in violence. If that be the fact—and it can scarcely be otherwise, or he would have the marks to show that he had been hurt—the responsibility for the firing of a volley by the mounted police into the disorderly and riotous but unarmed mob, must rest on the shoulders of the individual policemen; the officer in command; or on Mayor Gray. If the unhorsed policeman was not in danger—as now stated—and if Mayor Gray had not read the riot act—as it was at first said he had not—the law was being violated, not upheld, by the volley of the mounted police. As a matter of fact and of law murder was committed instead of justice being done.

The number of casualties from bullet wounds indicate that the policemen fired a volley. That one of them suffered from bullet wounds is evidence that there was no firing in return, notwithstanding the statement of the mayor. It is not likely that a volley was fired except the officer in command gave the order. It will be noted that the press reports do not give the name of the officer in command.

The firing was not in self-defence, or in rescue. Therefore it could only be justified by the previous reading of the riot act. The questions are: Was the riot act read before the volley was fired?

and if not who gave the order to fire?

The rioters were in defiance of the law. They were wrong. The police did vastly more damage than the rioters. If they acted outside the law they were as wrong as the rioters. It is to be hoped that the time has not yet come when constituted authority rules by force instead of by law.