

Travelling back to the Red River for the funeral was out of the question. Alone in Montreal, far from his native land, he made a very important decision: he would not pursue his studies. Some have wonder why, since he was a good student and was doing well. I do not have a confirmed explanation but I have an interpretation.

The decision to drop out of school also meant that he was giving up the idea of becoming a priest. One has to wonder whether it is the decision not to become a priest that resulted in his dropping out of school.

**The Hon. the Speaker:** Senator Riel, I must remind you of the Rules. However, the honourable senators may wish that Senator Riel finishes his speech.

**Hon. Senators:** Agreed.

**Senator Riel:** One has to wonder whether it is the decision not to become a priest that resulted in his dropping out of school. This is a situation that some of us that studied in classical colleges and small seminaries, have experienced. I have personally seen it happen.

One of my fellow students in college dropped out. He told me: I cannot do this to my benefactor, my family, my teachers, and so on. He thought this would be disloyal, so he became a garage owner. He may have done better than if he had become a lawyer or a priest, but that is another question.

This situation created a mental block for our young hero. I believe that he dispelled this trauma and this feeling of guilt by pursuing a youthful dream, perhaps quite normal, namely to transmit his philosophy of freedom, equality and fraternity to his people from the Red River and to all the immigrants of the world that would join them. You can find that in his writings.

Louis Riel then spent some time in the law firm of Sir Georges Etienne Cartier, to whom he made an ode as was the custom, and then in the office of Rodolphe Laflamme, if I am not mistaken. We know that Sir Georges was the lawyer for both the railroads and the Sulpicians, which is not necessarily a contradiction. As for Laflamme, he was a red radical from the Canadian Institute of Montreal and he pleaded against the Sulpicians in the Guibord case.

Two or three years later Louis Riel is back at the Red River. He is well educated, he can speak French, English and some local dialects, and he will play a major role in the protection of the rights of the Metis but also of all the residents of the area by obtaining that the Canadian government recognize their rights. He was instrumental in having the fundamental act of Manitoba passed, as well as the list of rights, and he obtained the recognition of linguistic and religious rights in Manitoba, just like those that Quebec had.

I could go on and talk about the role of the Catholic church in the events that took place. I could talk about the role of Donald Smith who would later become Lord Strathcona, and for whom I have a lot of respect. Lord Strathcona became the Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company and later President of Canadian Pacific. It is said that he would have cleverly distributed some dollars of the time, real dollars, to solve the

problem but that Louis Riel, a young idealist of 23, would have refused.

● (1530)

Apparently, these dollars were given to other people for charity work.

Anyway, in November 1885, the Canadian Pacific held the famous ceremony of the Last Spike, with the famous painting showing Lord Strathcona. It was on November 7th. As for Louis Riel, he was hanged a week later, on November 16th. All this was told to me, about twenty years ago, by a former president of the Canadian Pacific, who allowed the company to float a major public borrowing which it just needed.

You might ask why Louis Riel wanted to found a religion. I think I can skip over that point.

I mostly have something to say about the effect. What you should not forget is that the hanging of Louis Riel had the effect of a nuclear bomb in the province of Quebec. It produced an enormous emotion which was maintained, sustained and used by talented politicians. It permitted Honoré Mercier to form the first nationalist Party which brought together Liberals, Conservatives and Beavers, that is the ultramontane Conservatives of that era. Honoré Mercier won the elections in 1886, riding on an emotional wave never seen before in Quebec.

Louis Riel's hanging led to a series of inflamed and well-attended public meetings. One of these was held on the Champ-de-Mars, in Montreal, where two great orators of the time, Honoré Mercier and Sir Wilfrid Laurier, spoke to a crowd of 50 000 people the day after Riel's death. My memory is not so good, but one of those two men started his speech as follows:

"Too late, it is too late, my brother Riel has died."

and Sir Wilfrid made the following statement:

"If I had been along the Saskatchewan River, I too would have raised my rifle."

As I have said, people in Quebec were very upset. I doubt there was ever a stronger emotion. It was stronger than in 1837, because in 1837, the Church had forbid participation in the uprising. If you took the trouble to read the speeches delivered by Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Honoré Mercier, you would find the words "distinct society", which goes to show that words arouse different reactions depending on the persons and the times in which they are uttered. Montaigne expressed that very well more than 400 years ago when he said:

Grammar is the source of most of the world's troubles.

In October 1968, the Government of Saskatchewan, under Premier Ross Thatcher, unveiled a monument to Louis Riel in front of the provincial Parliament building in Regina. The Premier invited Canada's new Prime Minister, Mr. Pierre Elliott Trudeau, my fellow university student and friend, who took me to this ceremony. There was a great banquet with many guests which was a big success. I believe the erection of that monument showed, even back then, the spirit of redress