

March 30, 1874

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, March 30, 1874

[*Note: The opening of the 1874 session of Parliament was dominated by the uncertainty over the intentions of Louis Riel, elected in the Manitoba riding of Provencher in January. The Globe, in its issue of March 31, describes the excitement in Parliament the previous day as the Commons began the debate on the Address in answer to the Speech from the Throne.*]

That Riel was lurking somewhere in the neighbourhood of Ottawa was generally understood during yesterday, and all sorts of rumours were in circulation as to his intention. However, at half-past twelve o'clock he presented himself at the Clerk's office, took the oath of allegiance, and signed the roll. The news soon spread and speculation was rife as to what would happen next. When the House met, many eyes were directed to the vacant seat in the northwest corner of the Chamber, where, on the back row of benches, to the seat occupied last session by Mr. Church was attached a label marked with the ominous name of Riel. But Riel did not appear, and it is confidently stated he has left Ottawa, or possibly is hiding away awaiting the changes of fortune somewhere not far off. His late opponent, Mr. Hamelin, as the Speaker informed the House, had written a letter claiming the seat, on the ground that Riel was disqualified, but the document had, of course, no effect under the new system of remitting all such questions to a judicial tribunal, and Riel, therefore, had in that respect nothing to gain by coming to Ottawa. He can pocket his mileage, however, even although he never enters the Chamber, and this on the round trip between Fort Garry and Ottawa is no trifle. That he can be allowed to sit in the House, with an indictment hanging over him for murder, is quite out of the question.

The opening speeches in the debate on the Address are the theme of general congratulatory remark. An old Parliamentarian, and one of the most notable members of the House, remarked that Mr. Moss' speech was the first of its kind that he had ever known to be a complete success. The speaker's tone was manly and independent, and he showed, moreover, that whilst a loyal supporter of the Administration, he was capable of bringing to bear upon the policy of the Government a thoroughly impartial and critical judgment. Mr. Moss' political friends cheered him heartily on rising, but he was applauded by both sides of the House when he concluded.

Mr. LAURIER, the seconder, spoke in French, a circumstance that deprived many members of the pleasure of fully understanding a speech that those who could enjoy it declared to be of the highest order. Mr. Laurier's appearance is youthful, but he is already well known as an eloquent public speaker, and he addressed the House with the quiet but earnest manner of a practised debater. He, like the mover of the Address, was warmly cheered by both Ministerialists and Opposition members when he sat down.

Before the rising of the House **Mr. BOWELL** moved a resolution which would bring up the whole question of Riel's position tomorrow.

The SPEAKER took the chair at 3 p.m.

Prayers

THE ELECTION FOR PROVENCHER

The SPEAKER stated that on Friday last he received a document relating to the Provencher election, which he felt at the time was not his duty to submit to the House. However, as the matter was one of importance, affecting the privileges of the House, more or less remotely, and as he had so recently been called to the chair he thought it right to state what was the nature of the document, and what were his reasons for not submitting it to the House.

A gentleman named Hamelin had stated that he was a candidate for the representation of Provencher at the last election, and he claimed that Mr. Riel, who had been returned as elected for that county, was disqualified. On account of that disqualification this gentleman claimed that he himself should be declared by this House the sitting member for Provencher. No petition regarding this matter had been presented, and perhaps on that account a technical objection might be raised against the document. It did not raise any question of privilege directly, or vindicate any privilege in any way. It simply made a claim to the seat which the Returning Officer declared to be the seat of Louis Riel.

As the law passed in the session of 1873 had taken the settlement of these matters out of the hands of the House and transferred it to the Judges of the different Provinces, and as this document was merely a personal claim, and, as he had said, this House had no right to interfere between these individuals, whatever the rights of the case might be, in vindication of its own privilege, he had thought it his duty to submit the document to the House, and to inform the House of his decision and the reason upon which it was based.

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PETITIONS

The following petitions were presented:—

Mr. CHISHOLM—From Messrs. W.H. Storey and others, praying for further protection for Canadian manufacturers.

Mr. MacKENZIE (Montreal West)—From the citizens of Montreal, for an Act to incorporate a company to establish a line for