

The ruling passion has for its origin the criminal purpose which the perverted intellect has consecrated and transformed into a sense of duty.

In this case the purpose was supreme power, both civil and religious. The redress of grievances on one part, and the desire of personal pecuniary advantages on the other, do not seem to me to have been the principal motors of Riel's actions, though they certainly were important factors in his conduct. But that object, supreme power, was criminal and could not qualify, could not excuse him. It is a wrong theory, and it would be a dangerous doctrine to excuse and leave without punishment crimes committed with the conviction that the act accomplished is one calculated to redress a wrong or to bring good results to the community.

I am not a free thinker. I believe that free thinking is the most pernicious evil of this country. It has engendered the worst utopias against moral, social and religious order. But those who claim the right to the most absolute liberty for human thought, will restrict that liberty to the theoretical regions, and they are ready to punish it when it comes in conflict with existing laws. They will punish the manifestation of the idea after having given to that idea the freedom of the world. I agree with their conclusion in that respect; but I am logical, and I believe in the right, nay in the obligation of punishing the perversity of the doctrine. I believe that a man is guilty when he does not reserve his intelligence from the contagion of false doctrine. In the words of one of the most eminent Catholic writers of this age, in speaking of those whose guilty leniency towards the errors of the mind, gives an excuse to revolution and socialism:

"They go so far as to say that error is no guilt, that man is not bound to search the inmost of his soul to see whether there are not some secret causes that lead him away from the path of truth. They declare that in the spheres of human ideas, all human and divine laws are useless and out of place. What insanity! As if it was possible to exempt from any rule the highest and the most noble portion of human nature! As if the essential element, which makes of man the being of creation could be dispensed from the rules of that divine harmony of the various part of the universe together and of that universe with its divine maker; as if that sublime harmony could exist or even be conceived with man, unless the first of human obligations be the constant accord with truth, that eternal attribute of divinity!"

This is the solid and only logical foundation for the legitimate punishment of a number of crimes which otherwise would find their excuse in the erroneous but firm convictions of their perpetrators. In such cases the law is at liberty to admit that the criminal was actuated by a wrongful notion of his intelligence, but it declares guilty the idea which has brought that erroneous conviction in them; and