

The Clergyman as Historian: the Rev. A.-G. Morice, O.M.I., and Riel Historiography*

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Louis Riel is one of the most passionate and fascinating figures in Canadian history. Much of the early literature dealing with Riel revealed more about the nature of contemporary Canadian society or the author's concept of the Canadian identity than it did about the Metis leader or his motives. Thus, English authors tended to regard Riel as a murderer, traitor and rebel, while French authors saw him as a hero, martyr and patriot. This latter interpretation was especially valid for Riel's role in the Red River Insurrection of 1869-70 which resulted in the creation of the Province of Manitoba. The other significant event associated with Riel, the North-West or Saskatchewan Rebellion of 1885, created consternation for French Catholic writers because of Riel's assumption of the role of prophet and his attempt to establish a new Catholic order in the West including a North American papacy. Hence, the defence of Riel in 1885 was essentially the response of secular political Quebec. Catholic clerical Quebec found it difficult, if not impossible, to defend Riel's actions in 1885 because of his religious aberrations and when clergymen wrote on Riel it was in terms of the events of 1869-70.¹

As a controversial figure Riel presented an ideal topic for the pen of Adrien-Gabriel Morice, O.M.I., a man who was appropriately described as a "caractère impossible" by a contemporary colleague.² A talented and

* This presentation deals with only one of the historical topics examined by Father Morice. He published many other historical works, among them a four-volume history of the Catholic Church in western Canada. In addition, he wrote numerous articles and books on linguistic, ethnological and anthropological subjects. Note 52 contains a reference to a complete bibliography of Father Morice's works.

¹ The author is grateful to the University of Lethbridge for an SSHRC Isolation Grant to pursue the research for this paper. For an example of such an account, consult L. Groulx, *Louis Riel et les événements de la Rivière-Rouge en 1869-70*, (Montréal: *l'Action Nationale*, 1944).

² Archives of Saskatchewan, Papers of l'Association culturelle franco-canadienne de la Saskatchewan, File 98, P.E. Myre, "Quelques données sur les débuts du *Patriote de l'Ouest*."

versatile person, Morice was convinced that he was being deprived of the recognition he deserved as a missionary and scholar. He was irascible and obstinate, traits which alienated those with whom he came into contact and exasperated his ecclesiastical superiors. A recent study demonstrates that Morice was a social misfit, “an enormously vain and egotistical man who was obsessed with gaining power as a missionary and savant.”³ As a missionary he became a powerful figure in native society and acted as a broker between the Indians, the Hudson’s Bay Company and the government. A Hudson’s Bay Company official once referred to Morice as “the king of the country,” an accolade which pleased the missionary and which appropriately described his nineteen years among the Carrier Babine and Sekani Indians of north central British Columbia.⁴ Morice also used his first-hand knowledge of Indian society and traditions to publish numerous monographs and books and gain acceptance in ethnological, anthropological and linguistic circles. He also desired to be “the king of the country” in the intellectual arena and engaged in numerous polemics in which he set out to rectify the alleged errors or misconceptions of others. Many of these acrimonious exchanges were essentially much to-do about nothing and represented Morice’s need to assert himself and be accepted.⁵

In the study of Louis Riel, Morice found more than sufficient material to satisfy his intellectual curiosity, to gain acceptance as an historian, to refute the errors of others, to defend the French Catholic cause, to be at the centre of controversy and to realize a profit from his writings. Morice’s interest in Riel began in 1906 when he undertook to write a series of articles dealing with the principal events in Manitoba’s history.⁶ Stating that he did not wish to write without being certain of the facts, Morice sought information from Joseph Riel, a younger brother of the Metis leader.⁷ Morice advised his correspondent to read Dom Benoît’s *Vie de Mgr Taché* which described all that Bishop Taché had done for “ses chers Métis,” especially Louis Riel. Morice went on to state that an entry on Louis Riel would appear in his forthcoming biographical dictionary. Reiterating his duty to tell the

³ D.B. Mulhall, “The Missionary Career of A.G. Morice, O.M.I.,” Ph.D. Thesis, McGill, 1978, p. vii

⁴ D.L.S., *Fifty Years in Western Canada. The Abridged Memoirs of Father A.G. Morice, O.M.I.*, (Toronto: Ryerson, 1930), p. 96.

⁵ Mulhall, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

⁶ These articles were published serially in *La Nouvelle France*, 6 (1907), pp. 160-69, 210-23, 255-66, 307-18, 360-71, 408-21, 463-75, 518-76; 7 (1908), pp. 70-75. *Aux sources de l’histoire manitobaine*, (Québec: L’Événement, 1907), 120 pp.

⁷ Provincial Archives of Manitoba [PAM] MG3 01, 450, Morice to Riel, 2 février, 1907.

truth, Morice claimed that as a Catholic he could not approve of some of Riel's actions in 1885. He stated that Riel had a keen mind and good religious convictions but that the fury and hatred with which Orange Ontario had pursued him finally affected his mental state. Morice declared that he would only comment briefly on this sad episode and would stress Louis' death as a reconciled Catholic.⁸

In addition to shocking Morice, Joseph Riel's reply indicated that the Metis community was dissatisfied with traditional interpretations. Joseph Riel contended that too much emphasis had been placed on Taché's career as a missionary and that the Bishop's reputation had been tarnished by his involvement in political affairs on behalf of the Canadian government. Taché's intervention resulted in promises that were never kept and this contributed to the Rebellion of 1885 because similar problems emerged and the Metis were again forced to defend their rights and liberties. Joseph Riel countered Morice's claim that Taché had done so much for the Metis by alleging that Taché had used his authority as bishop to make the Metis accept the conditions formulated by the Canadian government. Instead of assisting the Metis in the vindication of their rights, the clergy, "the friends of justice," carried out secret intrigues against them and then refused the sacraments to those who supported Riel's movement. On the matter of his brother's insanity Joseph Riel declared that he was not a megalomaniac but that circumstances had imposed that behaviour on him. Louis Riel pretended to be a prophet to inspire the Metis who otherwise would have abandoned him when their cause appeared hopeless. Joseph Riel informed Morice that the Metis would continue to struggle for justice and to defend the memory of those who had fought and died in 1885.⁹

As could be expected, Morice resented being called an apologist and argued that he was the "sincere but discrete friend" of the Metis cause. He protested, furthermore, that he was the first author to denounce the use of the term rebellion to designate the events of 1869-70 and that his impartiality and detachment had created a profound impression in the minds of English Protestant readers. On the subject of Bishop Taché, Morice argued that a prelate had to be concerned with the general welfare of his flock. If one were to find fault with the bishop, it was because he placed too much faith in unscrupulous politicians.¹⁰

A few days later, Morice again wrote Joseph Riel to reiterate his sympathy for Louis. Morice insisted, however, that sympathy had its limits and

⁸ *Ibid.*, 451, Morice to Riel, 15 avril, 1907.

⁹ *Ibid.*, copy of letter in Joseph Riel Journal, item No. 616.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 452, Morice to Riel, 23 mai, 1907.

that one could not distort the truth by insisting on “certain things.” He added that Joseph Riel would not be able to sleep if he read what English authors had to say about his brother. Morice hinted that in the near future he might write a history of the West which the English would find difficult to accept.¹¹

Despite periods of silence which worried Morice, Joseph Riel continued to answer his queries and provide him with documents and other information.¹² In July 1907, Morice informed his correspondent that the next article would focus on Louis Riel and that it would be so sympathetic that his excellent reputation as an historian might suffer. Morice cautioned that if he were writing a true history, rather than a series of historical essays, he would have to adopt a less sympathetic position.¹³

In the meantime, Morice communicated with Taché’s biographer, Dom Benoît, because he had been unable to find any source to substantiate Benoît’s contention that the Governor of Assiniboia had abdicated his authority in 1869. Morice accepted this interpretation but wished to be certain of the facts.¹⁴ As a result of comments and suggestions made by Archbishop Langevin of St. Boniface, Morice wrote a chapter entitled “Questions épineuses” which discussed the political vacuum in Red River in 1869, the legitimacy of Riel’s provisional government and Riel’s loyalty to British institutions.¹⁵ In preparing this section Morice wrote Joseph Riel asking for information on Thomas Scott, who had been executed by the Provisional Government. Morice stated that he would not be able to exonerate Louis Riel as much as he would like to and would put forth the thesis that it would have been preferable to let Scott live. Morice would, nevertheless, attempt to justify the execution, adding that no serious historian had undertaken this thankless task.¹⁶ In a subsequent letter Morice demonstrated the delicate nature of the historian’s role by revealing that he had been accused of attempting to glorify Louis Riel. He claimed that he was going against public opinion on the “burning question” of Scott’s death and would prove that it was not a murder as English authors asserted and, hence, the agitation surrounding the execution was ridiculous.¹⁷

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 453, Morice to Riel, 2 juin, 1907.

¹² *Ibid.*, 456, Morice to Riel, 6 juillet, 1907.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 459, Morice to Riel, 22 juillet, 1907.

¹⁴ Archives of the Archdiocese of St. Boniface [AASB], Fonds Benoît, Morice to Dom Benoît, 9 août, 1907.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Fonds Langevin, L49907-08, Morice to Langevin, 29 juillet, 1907.

¹⁶ PAM, MG3 D1, 460, Morice to Riel, 19 août, 1907.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 461, Morice to Riel, 7 septembre, 1907.

A few weeks later Morice informed Joseph Riel that he would have to comment on 1885 in his forthcoming *Dictionnaire historique* but that he would do so as prudently as possible. He claimed that he would have to confront the religious issue which others had avoided or examined only in a cursory manner. Reiterating his sympathy for Louis Riel, Morice said he would defend him “tout en admettant discrètement certaines erreurs que vous n’êtes pas sans connaître bien qu’on ait dû vous en cacher beaucoup.”¹⁸ Morice argued that he would not attempt to alter Joseph Riel’s convictions because fraternal love prevented him from ascertaining the truth. Morice also argued that illness was not dishonourable and that enough had been done to Louis Riel to make him lose his sanity.¹⁹

Joseph Riel was not convinced by these comments and he accused the clergyman of being an enemy of the Metis. Morice defended himself by stating that Louis Riel had not wanted to apostatize but that an unjust persecution by Orangemen and others had affected his mental state. He reminded Joseph Riel that in 1885 it was only those who wanted to hang his brother who declared that he was sane. Morice concluded by expressing the hope that one day Joseph Riel would realize, as had many others, the good which his articles had done for Louis Riel’s cause.²⁰

Morice sent a copy of the Riel entry to Archbishop Langevin in order that the prelate could ascertain the refined nature of the *Dictionnaire historique*, which the author hoped would become ““un petit monument au génie canadien-français.””²¹ Langevin, however, expressed reservations about the description of the clergy’s influence and Morice was quick to reply that it was stressed in a nonequivocal manner. To highlight Taché’s influence over Riel, Morice stated that he had added another sixteen lines to the text demonstrating how the North-West had been preserved for Canada rather than annexed to the United States.²²

After the publication of the *Dictionnaire historique* Morice wrote Joseph Riel stating that it was the first book that officially recognized the Metis race. He added that it was very sympathetic to the Metis and the faults which the

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 463, Morice to Riel, 29 octobre, 1907. Morice’s *Dictionnaire historique des Canadiens et des Métis français de l’Ouest* was published in 1908.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 465, Morice to Riel, 21 novembre, 1907.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 466, Morice to Riel, 19 décembre, 1907.

²¹ AASB, Fonds Langevin, L4991 1, Morice to Langevin, 27 décembre, 1907.

²² *Ibid.*, L49915, Morice to Langevin, 12 janvier, 1908. In this instance Morice was really reiterating Langevin’s personal opinions on Taché’s role. Archives Deschâtelets [AD], HE 1981.1,27L. 1, Langevin to Morice, 24 juillet, 1907.

author had to find in them were a guarantee of the book's impartiality.²³ A short while later, Morice reminded Joseph Riel that the entry on Louis Riel was the longest after that on Bishop Taché and that in itself was no small honour. Morice hoped that the Metis would demonstrate their gratitude by purchasing many copies of the *Dictionnaire* and indicated that discounts would be given for large orders. He also sent Joseph Riel a complimentary copy, asking him not to lend it to others to read but to publicize it to stimulate sales among the Metis.²⁴

Joseph Riel, however, was not willing to accept the complimentary copy and forwarded the purchase price to the author. The clergyman replied that he would accept the money because he did not wish to insult Riel by returning his payment. Joseph Riel accused Morice of not accurately depicting the role of the clergy, especially Bishop Taché. Not wishing to discuss matters that excited or caused grief to his correspondent, Morice reminded him that a brother could not be expected to make a sound judgment on issues involving another member of the family. Morice described himself as the partisan of the Metis and turned aside the accusation that he had listened to only "une cloche" by declaring that, in addition to documents supporting Louis Riel, he had others which could condemn him.²⁵

In the meantime, a group of prominent Metis in St. Vital formed the *Comité Historique de l'Union Nationale Métisse* for the purpose of reexamining the historical record dealing with 1869-70 and 1885 and compiling a more veritable account of the role of the Metis in those events. For this latter purpose the *Comité Historique* employed Auguste-Henri de Trémaudan, a journalist and author. Morice had occasion to communicate with de Trémaudan, whom he sarcastically referred to as "the great, that is, future historian of the Metis." Sometime later, Morice expressed surprise that de Trémaudan had not abandoned his project.²⁶

Morice also continued his research and in 1914 published *Histoire abrégée de l'ouest canadien*. This book, destined for use in elementary schools, involved the clergyman in a bitter public controversy with the *Comité Historique*. Prior to this encounter, Morice had irritated the Metis of St. Vital when he attempted to ascertain what happened to the body of Thomas Scott, executed by the Provisional Government on March 4, 1870. Morice became convinced that the body had not been thrown into the river but that it had been buried by three Metis. Morice based his argument on a

²³ PAM, MG3 D1, 467, Morice to Riel, 24 février, 1908.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 468, Morice to Riel, 9 mars, 1908.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 469, Morice to Riel, 15 mai, 1908.

²⁶ AASB, Fonds Langevin, L41259-60, Morice to Langevin, 31 janvier, 1912.

discussion he had had with André Nault, Louis Riel's cousin and a member of the tribunal that had condemned Scott. Nault had hinted that he knew how Scott's body had been disposed of and, when asked by Morice if he could identify the precise location, Nault replied, "No, there are too many." From this Morice concluded that the corpse had been buried in a cemetery in the northern part of Winnipeg. Roger Goulet, whose father had been a member of the burial party, advised Morice that only two men had been involved and that Nault had not been one of them. Goulet did not identify the participants and Morice refused to believe his assertion that the body had been dropped in the river.²⁷

In January 1921, Morice added to the controversy surrounding Scott's body when his comments on Reverend R.C. MacBeth's book, *The Romance of Western Canada*, were published in *La Liberté*, Winnipeg's French-language newspaper. Morice severely criticized the sections of the book dealing with the Red River Insurrection as being false and erroneous. Turning to the author's contention that the corpse had been weighted down with a chain and dropped into the river, Morice declared that, based on "the most irrefutable of authorities," he was the only white person who knew where the body was. Furthermore, Morice claimed that MacBeth had erred in identifying Elzéar Goulet as a member of the burial party.²⁸

Morice's comments were refuted by Camille Teillet, a Metis from St. Vital who informed Morice that Elzéar Lagimodière and Elzéar Goulet had disposed of Scott's body. They had sworn to never reveal the location of the body and their secret had died with them. The Metis who pretended to know the location of the grave was not taken seriously by anyone but Morice. According to Teillet, Morice raised suspicions that one of the two Metis had broken their oath and this created uneasiness among the Metis community.²⁹ Morice would claim later that as a result of his few "inoffensive lines" concerning Scott's body he had received letters ""grossièrement insultantes" from St. Vital.³⁰ Morice countered the argument of betrayal by stating that he had acquired his information by questioning his informant as a lawyer would and the promise had been scrupulously kept because the precise location in the cemetery had not been revealed.³¹

²⁷ PAM, MG3 D1, 487, Roger Goulet, "Notes relatives à la lettre du père Morice," 1 février, 1921.

²⁸ AD, HF.244.A24R.21, Clipping, August 6, 1930.

²⁹ PAM, MG3 D1, 486, Teillet to Morice, 31 janvier, 1921.

³⁰ *La Liberté*, 19 août, 1925.

³¹ *Winnipeg Free Press*, January 25, 1926.

Sometime later, in February 1925, the *Comité Historique* sent Morice a copy of a report it had prepared on errors contained in his *Histoire abrégée de l'ouest canadien*. These alleged errors consisted of the following assertions in Morice's discussion of 1885: that Riel had forced the Metis to join his movement; that the Metis had been responsible for the massacre of missionaries at Frog Lake; that Oblate priests had been held prisoner at Batoche and that Riel had been captured on May 16. The *Comité Historique* expressed the hope that the author would undertake to correct these errors.³²

Morice, however, did not reply and the *Comité Historique* then brought the matter to the attention of the *Association d'Éducation Canadienne Française du Manitoba* because that organization could prevent the distribution of the books in primary schools. The association appointed a three-man committee to carefully examine the allegations and it recommended that Morice be sent a copy of a letter prepared by the *Comité Historique*. When Morice also ignored this communication, the committee passed a resolution asking the association to cease awarding the book as a prize or recommending that it be purchased by school boards. Furthermore, a copy of this resolution was to be sent to Morice and published in *La Liberté*. For its part the *Comité Historique* refuted the erroneous interpretation of 1885 in a lengthy letter in the same journal.³³

The imbroglio between Morice and the *Comité Historique* became associated with an incident in Batoche on July 10, 1925, when a monument was being unveiled to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the Saskatchewan Rebellion. Although the local clergy had energetically protested against the term "rebel" in the inscription and a visiting group from Quebec, *La Liaison Française*, had refused to attend for the same reasons, the *Comité Historique* complained that in the addresses at Batoche, the Métis and their leader again had been unjustifiably calumniated. The *Comité Historique* said that it was seeking the truth in order to obtain justice for the heroes of 1869-70 and 1885 not only for their sake but, more importantly, for that of future generations who would no longer have to be ashamed of their past.³⁴

A short while later Morice replied to these allegations in a lengthy missive also published in *La Liberté*. After all he had done for the Metis cause, he was surprised at having incurred the hostility of those who were moving heaven and earth to rehabilitate the "pauvre malade" who had been the leader. Turning to his controversial book, Morice reminded the *Comité*

³² AD, HE 245.A24Z.8, Nault to Morice, 10 février, 1925.

³³ *La Liberté*, 5 août, 1925.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Historique that its president had publicly praised him when it appeared. Furthermore, the book had been written at the request of Archbishop Langevin and was as much the late prelate's work as his own. Morice explained his earlier silence by stating that he did not want to provoke any more insulting letters from St. Vital such as those sent to him after he had written about Scott's body. Since he was in Argyle, Minnesota, he did not have his documents at hand nor did he have a copy of his book. Furthermore, this study had received the approbation of the most critical authority, Bishop Langevin, and, hence, did not require that of the *Comité Historique*. Morice declared that he would not retract one word and he accused the *Comité Historique* of playing with words. Describing the *Comité Historique*'s activities as a desperate whitewash, Morice reminded his detractors that it was difficult to change a Negro's color.³⁵

These comments naturally brought about a riposte from the *Comité Historique* which announced that it would not imitate the clergyman's tempestuous sarcasm but instead would refute his vague and indefinite allegations. The *Comité Historique* affirmed that no anonymous letters had been sent to Morice from St. Vital. He had received only one letter and that had been signed by Mrs. Joseph Riel on behalf of her sick husband. Morice in turn was accused of having slandered the memory of the Metis in his letters to residents of St. Vital. The *Comité Historique* also accused Morice of attempting to hide behind Bishop Langevin and argued that Langevin did not have the time to verify the details in his book.³⁶

For his part Morice would not let the matter lie, so in publishing his reply the editor of *La Liberté* advised readers that this was the final chapter in a polemic which could only serve to augment disagreement. Turning to the matter of the clergy held prisoner in Batoche, Morice warned the *Comité Historique* that it had to do more than simply deny the historical record: it had to demonstrate that it was incorrect. All of its partisan denigrations could not destroy his affirmation that Riel had prevented the sisters from seeking refuge in Prince Albert because he, Morice, had read the journal they kept during their ordeal. Turning to Langevin's competency as a judge, Morice claimed that the late bishop was infinitely better qualified to evaluate the facts than those who were yielding to pressure from within the Metis community to rehabilitate the reputation of a deranged person.³⁷

After this 'final word' the controversy faded and Morice continued his researches into the events of Red River and Saskatchewan. In 1935 he

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 19 août, 1925.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 9 septembre, 1925.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 23 septembre, 1925.

published his *magnum opus*, *A Critical History of the Red River Insurrection*. In the introductory chapter, entitled “A Travesty of History and its Causes,” Morice argued that racial prejudice and religious fanaticism were responsible for the jaundiced view that English authors held of Riel and his followers. He singled out four such writers, the Rev. George Young, the Rev. R.G. MacBeth, the Rev. George Bryce and the Rev. A.G. Garrioch, whom he described as “A Reverend Quartette of Anti-Riellites.” According to Morice, these individuals were responsible for “the fables and fabrications, groundless surmises and misrepresentations” which distorted the real fact of the Red River Insurrection.³⁸

The pages of *A Critical History* are merely a refinement of Morice’s views on the events of 1869-70. Riel’s resistance to encroachments by the federal government was justified because Ottawa had no jurisdiction over Red River.³⁹ Morice then commented at length to demonstrate that the rising was not a rebellion.⁴⁰ Scott’s execution was described as a “political mistake,” a punishment that was disproportionate to the offense. Nevertheless, the execution was the legal act of a legitimate government.⁴¹ In commenting on how he obtained his information on the burial of Scott’s body by skillfully questioning one of the survivors, Morice suggested that Scott’s burial was evidence that the Metis were “much more honourable and less free with a Christian body than their present day detractors would fain believe them to have been.”⁴² Morice concluded his book with a chapter on Riel’s loyal and patriotic role in the invasion of Manitoba by the Fenians in 1871.

The contents of *A Critical History* do not appear to have disturbed the Metis community. Its reponse to the writings of Morice and other proclerical interpretations took the form of A. H. de Trémaudan’s *Histoire de la Nation Métisse dans l’Ouest Canadien* published the following year, in 1936. The author died before completing a special chapter dealing with the most controversial topics associated with 1885 and, hence, the *Comité Historique* resolved to publish what de Trémaudan had written and to include the results of its own research and interviews in the form of an Appendix.⁴³ This 45-page Appendix refuted allegations to the effect that the Metis rebellion

³⁸ A.-G. Morice, *A Critical History of the Red River Insurrection After Official Documents and Non-Catholic Sources*, (Winnipeg: Canadian Publishers, 1935), facing p. 28, p. 33.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, ch. IV.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 295.

⁴³ A.H. de Trémaudan, *Histoire de la Nation Métisse dans l’Ouest Canadien*, (Montréal: Albert Levesque, 1936), p. 22.

was ill-advised and premeditated, that the Metis occupied and profaned the church in Batoche, that missionaries and sisters were held prisoner by the rebels, that Riel apostatized and founded a new cult. The Appendix also commented on the role of the missionaries in 1885, suggesting that they acted as informants to the authorities, defended the actions of the government and tacitly agreed to sacrifice Riel's life.

The Appendix was a personal affront to Morice, who had never forgiven the Metis for criticizing his *Histoire abrégée* 12 years earlier, and he responded accordingly. He displayed his indignation in an 87-page critique which was published serially in four issues of *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa* and later issued as a small booklet.⁴⁴ Morice divided his comments into two parts. The first was a general review of the book, while the second was a devastating critique of a document which he deemed reprehensible. Morice began by observing that de Trémaudan had been ill and that an author in good health could have done much better. Morice recalled a conversation with de Trémaudan in which the latter declared that the Metis were attempting to make him write statements which he regarded as false.⁴⁵ Morice took exception to the book's title and argued that there never had been and never would be a Metis nation: the Metis were only a race because they lacked a government, laws and definite geographical boundaries. Even worse than the misleading title was the fact that de Trémaudan had not provided footnotes, allegedly because he did not wish to burden the text. According to Morice the real reason was that the author had relied on Metis gossip contained in "les petits papiers de SaintVital."⁴⁶ He then went on to enumerate the numerous omissions (13 pages), before turning to errors and mistakes (15 pages).

The remaining fifty pages of Morice's critique were devoted to the Appendix and he claimed that it contained material which the "clique" from Saint-Vital had not been able to force de Trémaudan to include in the main text. Furthermore, the Appendix was a reiteration of the arguments which the *Comité Historique* had raised earlier in criticizing Morice's book. Morice asserted that the "self styled historians" had found no new documents and that they had selectively interviewed eye-witnesses at Batoche in 1929 to produce an account which would rehabilitate Riel. According to Morice, the

⁴⁴ *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa*, 7 (1937) pp. 160-83, 364-79, 475-95; 8 (1938) pp. 79-107. *La race métisse. Étude Critique en marge d'un livre récent*, (Winnipeg, 200 rue Austin, 1938), 91 pp.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 7 (1937), p. 165.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 167-68.

only true historical documents were the letters of contemporary missionaries and their evidence given under oath at the rebel trials.⁴⁷

Morice then proceeded to challenge the issues raised in the Appendix. He denounced and proved as false the *Comité Historique*'s assertions to the effect that Riel's trial was a misleading "legal comedy," that the Metis had taken up arms to defend their homes, that the resort to arms had not been premeditated and that the Metis had voluntarily taken up arms. In the *Comité Historique*'s discussion of the religious question in 1885 Morice discerned an even more horrendous travesty: "C'est là que nos réformateurs de l'histoire se surpassent."⁴⁸ Sarcastically describing the *Comité Historique* as "les docteurs de St. Vital" and "les théologiens de St. Vital," Morice categorically affirmed that Riel had established a new religion and had it accepted by his followers to remove them from the authority of the Catholic clergy who were opposed to his movement. Furthermore, Riel had usurped the role of the priest in the confessional.⁴⁹ Morice attempted to excuse and explain these "monstrous aberrations" by stating that Riel was not of sound mind when political or religious issues were involved. Riel was a megalomaniac and Morice criticized the *Comité Historique* for not mentioning this or the fact that Riel had been committed to an asylum.⁵⁰

The Appendix had been critical of the role of the missionaries in 1885 and Morice defended them by stating that they had opposed the agitation because they foresaw its disastrous outcome. Furthermore, scripture, theologians and popes had denounced attempts to overthrow duly constituted authority. Morice reminded the *Comité Historique* that the missionaries had done everything in their power to seek redress for Metis grievances and after the hostilities they had interceded on behalf of the Metis. To the allegation that the clergy had not sought clemency for Riel, Morice replied that while Riel's lawyers were attempting to obtain clemency through legal channels it would not have been wise for the clergy to become involved. Such an action would have aroused the hostility of the Orange Order and hence jeopardized the good that petitions for clemency might have accomplished.⁵¹

This lengthy and often vitriolic critique was Morice's last major work before his death on April 21, 1938. The comprehensive biographical essay of Morice's writings prepared by Father Gaston Carrière, O.M.I., is an

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 476-80.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 490.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 8 (1938), p. 85.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-106.

impressive testimonial to the multi-faceted career of a remarkable Oblate.⁵² An examination of Morice's historical writings, however, reveals that Morice was not as objective, impartial and revisionistic as he made himself out to be. He was obviously more subtle than l'abbé Groulx, who asserted that history had to be written from an ethnic and religious perspective to maintain the French Canadian nation in a dynamic state. Despite his claims to objectivity and detachment, Morice's writings on Riel were clearly an attempt to justify the French Catholic cause. This is evident in his *Critical History*, where the justice of the Metis cause and Riel's goodness are accentuated by the author's account of the slyness and malevolence of Canadians such as John Christian Schultz and Thomas Scott, who opposed the resistance of the Metis.⁵³

Morice's use of sources is another example of his attempt to manipulate the historical record. To begin with, he used sources selectively and, unlike the historian who uses a source as evidence of what happened in the past, Morice used sources as irrefutable authorities. It goes without saying that he accorded more importance to a statement made by a priest or bishop than that emanating from a layman. Morice did not subject his sources to various tests to evaluate their validity and accuracy. In his scheme of things it was preferable to have copious footnotes and a large number of sources, regardless of their quality. Furthermore, the more voluminous the source, the more impressive its title or official its nature, the more suitable it became. Equally important to Morice was the fact that one had to select sources from the enemy camp. This became the hallmark of objectivity. Morice's methodology was incorporated in the full title of his magnum opus: *A Critical History of the Red River Insurrection After Official Documents and Non-Catholic Sources*.

Once Occam's razor has been applied to the numerous controversies and debates in which Morice was engaged, it becomes apparent that few fundamental issues were involved. Morice was primarily a polemicist who felt compelled to correct the mistakes of others who were allegedly evading the real issues. In his own defence, Morice would argue that he had been misrepresented or misinterpreted by those who did not accept his views.

Morice also overestimated the impact of his own writings on Riel and the effect they had on English-Canadian opinion. Contrary to his affirmation that he had delved into matters which others had lacked the courage or conviction to explore, one finds no significant reinterpretation of Riel in his

⁵² G. Carrière, "Adrien-Gabriel Morice, o.m.i. (1859-1938) Essai de bibliographie," *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa*, 42, No. 3, 1972, pp. 325-41.

⁵³ A.-G. Morice, *A Critical History of the Red River Insurrection*, *op. cit.*, pp. 282-84.

writings. If Morice is consulted today, it is because of the information contained in his historical works. It is ironic to note that the book which did produce a dramatic change in English-Canadian attitudes towards Riel was George F.G. Stanley's *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions*, published in 1936, one year after the appearance of Morice's *Critical History*. In his study Stanley demonstrates that the events of 1869-70 and 1885 were not the "western battle ground of the traditional hostilities of French Catholic Quebec and English Protestant Ontario," but a western manifestation "of the problem of the frontier, namely the clash between primitive and civilized people."⁵⁴

⁵⁴ G.F.G. Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions*, (London: Longmans, 1936), p. vii.