

About a year later—too late—Sir John found it necessary to send a commissioner to explain the Dominion's intentions.

Then he made his thinking quite clear in a letter:

We must not make any indication of even thinking of a military force until peaceable means have been exhausted. Should these miserable half-breeds not disband, they must be put down, and then, so far as I can influence matters, I shall be very glad to give Col. Wolsely the chance of glory and the risk of a scalping knife.

The fact that the "miserable half-breeds" had a better claim than anyone save their Indian cousins to ownership of the country was of little concern to any Canadian, from the head of the Government all the way down to Dr. John C. Schultz.

NORTHERN LIGIIT LODGE

That was a long way down, Schultz was an ambitious meddler, western archetype of the political physician. He was ruthless and bigoted, but he was also a big man of superb physical strength, handsome, an effective speaker, intelligent and courageous. Sir John thought him "clever, but exceedingly cantankerous and ill-conditioned." Donald A. Smith of the Hudson's Bay Company, the future Lord Strathcona, was more blunt: he called Schultz a man "of very indifferent private character."

The doctor was an old Ontario friend of Minister McDougall and they kept in touch with each other by correspondence or through visits to Ottawa by Schultz. For a long time McDougall's only knowledge of conditions in the West came from Schultz. Later, when one of McDougall's own agents sent him an accurate appraisal of Red River sentiment coupled with an urgent warning, the Minister ignored it.

Schultz was born in 1840 and started the practice of medicine when he was twenty. He came west about that time, busied himself in political agitation and soon seized leadership of the Ontario faction, the "Canadian party." Though he had a head start on others in his profession, he neglected [his] medical practice to run a store and to become a partner in the newspaper, which was abusively anti-Metis and anti-Company as long as he was connected with it.

In 1868 the doctor sold his newspaper interest to a dentist whom he could depend upon to follow the Canadian line. In that year, too, he broke finally with the Company by successfully defying its legal authority. Imprisoned because he refused to pay a judgment imposed by the local court, he broke out of jail with the help of his wife and friends, then produced a witness whose story enabled him to go free. By the time Snow and Mair arrived and moved into his home he regarded himself as the biggest man in Assiniboia and made no secret of the fact that he expected political preferment when Canada assumed control.

Medicine, merchandising, politics and journalism were not enough, however, to fill the life of this indefatigable Canadian. Early in 1864 he took on another responsibility -leadership of the first Masonic lodge in the Northwest.

Several members of a company of United States troops temporarily stationed in Pembina were Masons, and in January, 1864, they established the "Northern Light" lodge in the border town. (Masons in a Montana gold camp had an earlier dispensation but did not get around to the formal organization of their lodge until a couple of years later.) Dr. Schultz led a group of candidates to Pembina from north of the boundary and in the spring he became acting master of the lodge. After the American troops withdrew from Pembina in October the lodge was moved to Fort Garry.

It lasted only five years, but it gave Schultz much influence over the Protestant white element. His newspaper hinted tantalizingly of ancient secrets known only to its editor and a select circle of his friends, and reported with smug flourishes the frequent Masonic meetings and social affairs.

The Catholic priests knew little about Masonry but feared the worst. They jittered and gossiped and communicated their alarm to the credulous Metis. Some of the clergy's suspicions were fantastic, but they did have cause for worry: many if not most of Schultz's Masonic colleagues were also affiliated with the Loyal Orange Institution.

Orangemen, implacable foes of Catholicism, were an important and sometimes dominant political force in Ontario, which was honeycombed with their lodges. The earliest Canadian immigrants brought the creed to Red River and it contributed strongly to the social tension. The community was half Catholic, and to add a complication the Catholics were French; the Irish political aspects of Orangeism were incomprehensible to them and mysteriously evil. Owing in no little part to the naive boasting of Schultz and a few others, Masonry was soon bracketed in the Catholic mind with this earlier and more bigoted arrival.

Masonry also alienated the Metis and other humble settlers because it sought to set up an elite social group. The standards of the new West were built upon achievement, not upon breeding or social standing, and upon skills rather than upon wealth. The scholar and aristocrat and the prosperous were respected if they could prove their usefulness to the community, but it behooved them to acknowledge the social equality of their neighbors: many a "gentleman" owed his life to an illiterate half-breed guide.

Most of the newcomers had fitted fairly easily into the new, liberal social pattern until the arrival of the militant "Canadian party" in the sixties. The Selkirk colonists had been farmers, artisans, military mercenaries—all poor and of varied racial stocks. The Americans had long since rejected the aristocratic [sic] tradition and now ostentatiously despised it. Only a small group, dubbed by one observer "a few Canadian snobs"—never more than a hundred individuals in a population of twelve

thousand—found it insupportable that they should have to put aside their starched dickeys in favor of the sweat-stained buckskins of the frontier.

The development of a new social concept was illustrated by an incident which occurred in 1857 when Henry Youle Hind, M.A., F.R.G.S., was exploring the Red River country. He visited the farm of John Gowler, nine miles from Fort Garry, and was invited to stay for lunch. Mrs. Gowler set only one place. Her husband seated the guest, then asked, "Where is my plate?" "Oh, John!" his wife remonstrated. "You would not think of sitting at table with a gentleman!"

John Gowler glanced about the room. His son-in-law and his children were watching silently.

"Give me a chair and a plate!" he said. "Am I not a gentleman too? Is not this my house, and these my victuals? Give me a plate!"

The tinder for the fire was nearly all assembled now in a remote prairie outpost where few contemporary observers could recognize the forces which had contributed fuel for the blaze.

Here were a new people, wild and free and in love with their land, unsure of themselves but proud of their traditional skills, timid now and brave tomorrow, gentle and savage.

Here were a few ambitious men of ability who wanted fame or money, or needed to recapture lost prestige; and a few who were merely foolhardy, who would never have been heard of in another, more populous setting.

Here were brilliant and aggressive men who would have thrust the boundaries of the reinvigorated United States north to the Pole, in obedience to the dictates of Manifest Destiny; and one who was bitterly dying, William Mactavish, who would have held that empire for the Company of Adventurers trading into Hudson's Bay.

A new ideal of social equality had been born here permitting John Gowler to sit at table with a gentleman: but it was threatened with destruction before it had a chance to establish itself.

Joseph Kinsey Howard, *The Strange Empire of Louis Riel*. Toronto : Swan Publishing Co. Ltd., Second Printing 1970 [copyright 1952] pp. 83-85.