

Hold High Your Heads: History of the Métis Nation in Western Canada by A.H. de Trémaudan, translated by Elizabeth Maguet. Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1982. Pp. 210, \$12.95, paper.

Originally published in the French language in 1936, this translation makes available a classic Métis version of the events of the 1885 Riel uprising. Maguet's rendition loses little of the original flavour and passion of de Trémaudan's work and consequently helps to illuminate the struggle for survival of a culture that has often been viewed through coloured glasses by many Canadians.

De Trémaudan's work is anything but analytic, but that was never the intent. In the original preface to the French edition, which is included in the book, the author declares that he "strove never to lose sight of the principle that recording history is a duty to be done without weakness of bias, regardless of the consequences to certain individuals. . . ." Still, he suggests that if the Canadian government had left Riel and the Métis alone after 1870, there would exist in Canada today a French province, a second Québec, that would serve as a foothold for the accentuated presence of the Métis in Canada. This stance is embellished in the foreword to the French edition where it is admitted that de Trémaudan was approved as historian by the Métis because of his "devotion and sincere friendship toward them." These kinds of notations at the outset set the stage for a history with a distinct point of view.

The three principal parts of the book comprise a discussion of the formation of the Métis Nation, its life and culture, and its final demise or "martyrdom." In the first section, de Trémaudan briefly outlines the nature of the maternal and paternal ancestors of the Métis people through the use of historical facts and dates. He then sketches the culture of the people who became the "fruit of the union." The original Métis, we are informed, were tall people, literally "giants," whose lifestyle was essentially nomadic. They were expert horsemen, and took great pride in raising strong fast animals for the hunt. They inherited an implacable logic from the French side of the family and a sense of probity and respect for individual ownership from their maternal side. In everyway, according to de Trémaudan, "the Métis settlements were the foundation of future civilization" in Canada.

De Trémaudan's portrait of Métis life includes a detailed account of the fur trade rivalry between The North-West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company, and of the various restrictions they sought to place on the Métis in an effort to control the fur-trade. For example, regulations controlled the hunting of buffalo on horseback, and the

cutting of wood, and the peeling of bark from trees to roof houses. Each restriction stabbed at the very heart of Métis culture and contributed toward the raised tempers among those who served as leaders. Eventually, and quite logically, according to de Trémaudan, conditions became intolerable and the people resisted. One of the plots of the counter-attack against the Métis, and Riel specifically, was to make the Métis leader to appear in the eyes of his own people as a Judas, ready to sell them for a sum of money. "He was painted as a character whose cruelty no one could imagine, and who was personally responsible for all the blood spilled during the Rebellion. It was hinted that he had ordered the massacre of Fathers Fafard and Marchand and the unfortunate victims of Frog Lake" (p. 147). Clearly there were few limits to which authorities would not go in seeking to discredit Riel and his cause.

The rather lengthy appendix to the book was formulated by the Métis Historical Society as a means of finishing the work which de Trémaudan had intended before his untimely death. Apparently, he had wanted to prepare a chapter dealing with the more controversial aspects of the 1885 events including such questions as: What was the Regina trial? Was the Métis insurrection ill-advised? Was the taking up of arms premeditated? Were the Métis forced to resort to arms? Did the Métis occupy and profane the church at Batoche? Were the missionary fathers and sisters made prisoners? Did Riel incite the Indians? Was Riel venal as claimed? The religious question is of special importance given de Trémaudan's earlier assertion that the Métis had a veneration for missionaries that never wavered (p. 17). Riel was charged with apostasy, the founding of a new cult, installing himself in the confessional and encouraging his followers to renounce their faith. Most of these charges are easily dismissed by the writers of the appendix by asking counter questions such as, "why has not a single adherent of Riel's 'new religion' ever been identified?" Apparently Riel always counselled his followers to be Catholic, nothing else.

Antoine S. Lussier's new introduction to the book, which includes an analysis of the historiography on Métis since the publication of *L'Histoire de la National Métisse*, is both poignant and helpful. He outlines the present controversies surrounding the writing of Métis history, implying that while some works are more accurate and objective than others, it is often difficult to separate fact from fiction. Historical controversy does not die easily, however, and the publication of such books as Thomas Flanagan's *Louis David Riel*, and Murray Dobbin's *The One and a Half Men* as well as the translation of this important work will ensure that.

Controversy aside, however, according to de Trémaudan, "the history of the Métis in the Canadian North-West is worthy of a place in the glorious annals of the history of the world" (p. 165). If the telling of

their side of the story can enhance that affirmation in any way, it is certain that the publication of this translation must be regarded as a very positive happening.

John W. Friesen
 Department of Educational Policy
 and Administrative Studies
 The University of Calgary

Helgi Einarsson: A Manitoba Fisherman translated by George Howser. Winnipeg: Queenston House, 1982. Pp. 147, \$15.95, cloth, \$8.95, paper.

This is the autobiography of an Icelandic-born fisherman who emigrated to Manitoba while in his teens and spent his life as a fisherman in the Manitoba Interlake. Helgi Einarsson was born in Iceland in 1870, emigrated to Canada in 1882 and died in 1961. However, the book focuses on the period 1890–1920.

For those interested in the “push” factors behind the Icelandic emigration of the 1870s and 1880s, there is a brief but good description followed by the universal reason for all emigration to Canada — “He. . . could improve his lot in life by emigrating.”

The book contains an excellent description of his journey to Winnipeg from Iceland — especially his stirring description of the countryside around Québec City — the port of arrival for so many immigrants to Canada but a city that most Canadians, especially western Canadians, perceive as the centre of Québécois culture rather than the central city of the great migration period.

The bulk of the book deals with Einarsson’s establishment as a fisherman on Lake Manitoba. The story is often disjointed. Apparently it is based on the model of the ancient Norse sagas, which Einarsson learned as a youth in Iceland.

Most of the articles and book reviews in *Prairie Forum* naturally deal with farming and farm related activities. This book is different in that farming is hardly mentioned. We learn the complexity of the fisherman’s world — not simply the hazards and difficulties of winter fishing in the harsh prairie climate, but also the hazards and difficulties of selling the product against monopolistic competitors. We also learn in some detail of the first boat powered by a gasoline engine on Lake Manitoba.

In addition, glimpses are caught of political processes at all three levels — municipal, provincial and federal. At the municipal level, Helgi made the direct appeal to City Council on an issue of licensing — an issue decided in his favour by that great Mayor of Winnipeg, J.H.