

CHAPTER XIII

A Macedonian Cry from Canada

“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed, saying: Come over to Macedonia and help us.” (Acts 16: 9.)

Two very important letters had been addressed to me from Quebec and Montreal in the beginning of January, 1859. The first was signed by about five hundred well-known names,—the second by about one hundred of the principal Roman Catholic French Canadians of the latter city.

Both letters were pressing invitations to go and address them on my reasons for leaving the Roman Church.

Many times before receiving these letters, the thought had come to me that it was my duty to go to Canada and attack the Church of Rome there, in her very stronghold. But I had postponed that work on account of the formidable difficulties and dangers connected with it. No two other places, probably, in the whole world, could be found, where Rome is so strong as Quebec and Montreal. To go and attack that giant power where it was surrounded and protected by its most impregnable citadels and armed with its most terrible weapons seemed to me a foolish thing,—a sure suicide.

Such was my way of reasoning till I received these two letters. But my views had to be modified and changed after their reception. How could I shut my ears to the cries of those precious, but perishing souls, who were so pressingly asking me to go and give them the bread of life?

At the voice of one Macedonian, heard through a vision of the night, Paul had left everything to meet the appeal. Was it not my duty to go, when, not called by only one voice through a night vision, but by so many hundreds, and in such

a public and solemn way? Having been assured by Mr. Gustave Demers, our ablest young evangelist, and Mr. Gauthier, our principal high school teacher, that they would give the Sabbath instruction during my absence, I determined to start the last week of January to go and work one or two months in Canada.

I will not speak of the distress of the people of St. Anne when I told them that resolution from the pulpit the next Sabbath. With tears and sobs they asked me not to go and expose myself to such evident dangers in Canada. I answered them that I felt it was the will of God that I should go; that my trust was in Him for protection. They would pray for me, day and night, during my absence, and I would come back to them full of a new strength, after sowing the good seed in our dear Canada, where the good Master would bless it, and make it grow one hundred fold in the hearts of their brothers, sisters and friends who were longing after it.

When on my way to Montreal I had to spend a day in Toronto. I was not there three hours, when I received a letter from the provincial Sub. Secretary, Mr. Parent, telling me:

“His Excellency, the Governor, in an informal conversation yesterday about you, has expressed the desire that I should try to dissuade you from going to the Province of Quebec to preach against the Church of Rome. Your presence there for such an object will probably bring riots which the government will not be strong enough to prevent or to stop. You know how Gavazzi, not long ago, came very near to being murdered, and how many were killed and wounded around him. Let this deplorable fact teach you to be more prudent; please do not raise difficulties or conflicts in the Province of Quebec, of which you may be the first victim. Allow me to give you the same advice. Do not shut your ears to the voice of

“Your most devoted friend,

“ETIENNE PARENT

“Sub. Secretary.”

I answered:

“My Dear Mr. Parent:—

“Please accept for yourself and give to his Excellency the assurance of my gratitude for the interest you take in my safety. But remember that I am now a soldier of Christ, enrolled under the sacred banner of His cross. If I have to shed my blood and die when fighting for its triumph over its enemies, in our dear Canada, that blood will not have been shed in vain, and my death will be the most desirable one I can wish for.

“Truly yours,
“C. CHINIQUY.”

When on my way from Toronto to Montreal, at several stations I received threatening telegrams, telling me that I was to be attacked on my arrival. But as these threats were not signed by any known persons, I did not pay any attention to them, thinking they were only designed to frighten me.

I was, however, to see the reality of the danger when the train arrived at the Montreal station, the first of February. A dense but silent multitude, such as I had never before seen at any station, was there, evidently looking with anxiety for the arrival of somebody.

Suspecting that I was the object of these anxious lookers-on, I thought that prudence required me to conceal myself as much as I could. I had a fur overcoat: I raised it in such a way that my face was perfectly concealed; my eyes only could be seen.

With the hope that no one would recognize me, I went down from the cars, and walked two or three steps through the dense crowd where everyone was whispering around me, “Where is he? Where is he?”

The accents of the voices, as well as the features of the multitude, told me that I was in the midst of a mob of furious and bloodthirsty Irishmen. All of them were armed with sticks, which they were brandishing over their heads.

Of course this made me more determined than ever to keep incognito. I pushed as hard as possible through the crowd, but it was so dense that it was difficult to move on. My anxiety was increasing with the incessant demands, at first whispered but soon loudly uttered: "Where is he? Where is he? The d—— apostate!"

At last a loud voice was heard at a pretty long distance from me, in French, "Le Père Chiniquy est-il ici?" "Is Father Chiniquy here?" I confess it to my shame: that voice sent a thrill of terror through my whole frame, when I felt sure that the multitude which surrounded me was composed of Irish Roman Catholics (many of them drunk) evidently there to murder me.

My only chance of escape was to remain incognito, till I could find a sleigh to take me to my hotel.

The first cry, "Le Père Chiniquy est-il ici? "Is Father Chiniquy here?" had been followed by a deadly silence; but bloody eyes, such as I have never seen, were looking sharply on every side, when the lips, now more free, were filling the air with enraged voices: "Where is he? The d—— apostate!"

Praying my God to protect and shield me, I was more and more trying to make my way through that unpleasant crowd, when another voice was heard asking, with a very strong and energetic accent, "Est-ce que le Père Chiniquy n'est pas là quelque part?" "Is not Father Chiniquy somewhere here?" But by this time the voice was very near, not two feet distant from me. Though I had no idea that the voice was a friendly one, and, though I was still under the impression that that whole crowd was composed of people thirsting for my blood; I felt so ashamed of my cowardice that, with a still louder voice I answered, "Oui, le Père Chiniquy est ici. Que lui voulez-vous?" "Yes, Father Chiniquy is here. What do you want of him?" The last syllable was still on my lips, when, as quickly as a flash of lightning, I saw a great number of people rushing around me from every side. But they

were pushing themselves with such energy that no one could stand before them. Those who were not in the secret of this movement, were falling on every side like the grass when the irresistible torrent suddenly rushes from the mountain.

Absolutely unable at first to understand what this new noise and tumult meant, I stood a moment amazed and bewildered. But the mystery was soon explained, when a friendly voice whispered in my ear: "Ne sortez pas de nos rangs. Nous sommes des amis accourus pour sauver votre vie menacée par une troupe d'Irlandais ivres et furieux qui veulent vous assassiner." *i. e.*, "Do not move out of our ranks. We are friends coming to protect you against a band of Irish drunkards who want to kill you." In less than a minute, I found myself surrounded by three circles of brave and well armed French Canadian countrymen.

Knowing that there was a plot in the lowest classes of the Irish Catholics to take away my life when I would arrive at the station, seventy-five intelligent and fearless young countrymen had formed a secret association under the name of "Francs-Frères," and they had drilled themselves in the most perfect way for several days, in order to be able to go through the crowd with the swiftness and power of an irresistible hurricane, and to form three impenetrable rings around me.

I felt that my merciful God had looked in His mercy on His unprofitable servant. He had chosen those dear young countrymen as the angels of His mercy to save my life in that hour, when so many were engaged to take it away. I blessed Him from the bottom of my heart. I felt absolutely safe in the midst of those three rings. I would have pitied the poor Irishmen who would have tried to go through those circles to strike me.

My generous friends had in readiness a number of sleighs to take us to the St. Lawrence Hall where they had engaged the best rooms for me, including the beautiful large parlour, for the price of \$50.00 a day.

One of the leaders of that band of dear countrymen, was Guibord, whose burial was to make so much noise a few years later.

What was my surprise and joy when those friends, giving me their names after our arrival at the hotel, I found that they were the élite of the literary as well as the cream of our best and wealthiest French Canadian families of Montreal. With only one exception they all belonged to the Church of Rome.

To understand better my feelings of admiration and gratitude, let the reader remember that the previous Sabbath, the Bishop of Montreal had ordered a mandement to be read in all the pulpits, forbidding the Roman Catholics to have anything to do with me. To speak to me or hear me was a damning crime, for which they would be excommunicated. And that mandement had been published in all the French daily papers.

The actions of those dear countrymen who, in spite of such a threat, had exposed their lives to protect mine, and who were surrounding me in that splendid parlour, and overwhelming me with all the tokens of their respect, was already the assurance of a more glorious victory over Rome than I had ever expected. They remained with me till twelve at night, then left me after having concerted the plans of campaign for the rest of the month, with the utmost prudence and wisdom. But before leaving, they granted me the favour I had asked, to read the one hundred and third Psalm: "Bless the Lord, O my soul! And let all that is within me bless His holy name."

And when alone I read again the so simple and sublime expressions of the gratitude of David for the mercies of his God. In fact, where could I find words more appropriate to express what I felt, after such narrow escapes and such marvellous protection in the very hour of danger? My heart was filled with the hope that, though this evangelical mission was to be connected with great dangers for my life, it was to be a

most blessed one. All the echoes of the plains and the mountains of Canada, were bringing to the ears of my soul the dear Saviour's words, "Fear not . . . I am with thee."

The last thought of my mind and the last words of my lips, on that memorable night, were: "The Lord is my shepherd; whom shall I fear?"