

CHAPTER XVI

How Roman Catholics Understand Liberty of Conscience. My Letter to the Bishops of Quebec and the Priests of Canada

"I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast . . . and decked with gold and precious stones, . . . having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: and upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth.

"I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints."
(Rev. 17: 3-6.)

If it were possible to awaken the Protestants of Canada from their deplorable and mysterious slumber, and to make them understand the anti-Christian and anti-social principles of the Church of Rome, the events of the fourteenth day of February, 1859, would have done it.

Of all the daily and weekly papers edited by the Roman Catholics of Canada, not a single word was written to blame the rioters for having attacked violently and driven me from my house. They all said that I had no right to preach doctrines contrary to the doctrines of Rome in Quebec, because the majority were Roman Catholics.

Though unable to find a single word of abuse fallen from my lips, they, however, said that they had the right, it was their duty, to kill me if I refused to go away.

They all declared that Mayor Hall was wrong to come to my help and protect me. They all proclaimed that he had no right to employ the civil and military forces to save my life and protect me. His duty was to let the rioters come, break everything in the house where I was staying, pull it down, if I refused to obey them.

Here are the very words of Mr. Audet, one of the councilors of the city of Quebec, reproduced and approved by the Roman Catholic press of Canada on this subject:

“I acknowledge Mr. Chiniquy’s liberty of speech when coming to speak against our holy religion, as I acknowledge the liberty of a thief to steal, and the liberty of an assassin to kill.

“When I deny the right of the robber to rob, and of the assassin to assassinate, of the sacrilegious to commit sacrilege, I also deny Mr. Chiniquy the right of coming here to insult and outrage us.”

Let us now come to the affair of Monday last.

“That day Mr. Chiniquy was to lecture in the hall of St. Anne St., and you, Mr. Pro-Mayor, you had received deposition affirming that there were to be disturbances at that lecture. Accordingly, by your order, all the civil forces were under arms! You knew that Mr. Chiniquy was the cause of all those troubles, and notwithstanding that, you, the first magistrate of the city, went yourself in search of Mr. Chiniquy to deliver that lecture to you! Suppose, Mr. Pro-Mayor, that there had been a riot and a bloodshed, would you not have been the cause of it? The Canadians have always respected every religious faith; but be assured that we will exact for ourselves the respect we bear towards others.

“We demand protection, and let it be distinctly understood that if it be refused to the 45,000 Roman Catholics of this city, they will know how to protect themselves; and then evil be to those who dare attack them. This will interfere somewhat with the Bible societies, but I warn them to seek some other field for the exercise of their zeal.

“Have they not, for instance, India, China, and Japan where they can go and throw their Bibles?”

These are some of the reflections of the “Quebec Mercury” concerning the above harangue of Mr. Audet.

“Mr. Audet has not only publicly uttered, but deliberately put on record, a declaration of war against the British popu-

lation of this Province. His appeal to the 45,000 Roman Catholics of Quebec is a cry for blood. And in what a cause? This agent of the priesthood has deliberately propounded the principles of the Spanish Inquisition as applicable to those who boast themselves (however erroneously) the free Protestant subjects of a Protestant sovereign.

“Mr. Audet boldly announces that *opinion* is a crime,—and that the magistrates are bound to restrain it.

“A man, he says, has the same liberty to lecture against Romanism, as to be a robber!

“The meaning is clear. He may be as liable to punishment in the one case as the other. The language of ‘The Univers,’ the Ultramontane organ in France, is nearly identical with that of Mr. Audet: it distinguishes liberty from right. He declares a man has no more right to be a Protestant than to commit a murder or a theft!

“Liberty of speech is to be forbidden, lest those it offends should deliberately break the law, and direful misfortunes for the whole world which must be subjected to the consequences of doing so!

“Mr. Audet concludes his speech by calling on his Roman Catholic hearers to make a new St. Bartholomew’s day of their Protestant neighbours! And he finishes by a threat to the Bible societies, to which the treatment formerly received by Mr. Papin, gives the utmost significance.”

When I went back to Montreal, I thought it was my duty to address a letter to the Bishops and priests of Canada. In the first part of that letter I gave a faithful history of the riot, which I will not repeat here. I will give only the second part.

“To the Roman Catholic Bishops and Priests of Canada:

“You have thus an abridged but faithful history of your own work of the fourteenth of February. But before leaving Canada, I owe it to my fellow countrymen, I owe it to the cause of truth, to address you a few words more.

“Within three years, look at the four riots you have caused

to rid yourselves of those you call 'Protestants, apostates, and enemies of your holy church.'

"Incapable of meeting your opponents on the ground of argument, worthy descendants and supporters of the Holy Inquisition, you have recourse to violence, to oppose and destroy the truth which makes you afraid; you have recourse to bloody riots to prop up your tottering power. It is well; continue; accustom the people to use the stick and the club for an argument. Discipline your adepts to shed the blood of those that you call the enemies of the holy Roman Church; applaud the murderers who knock down their victims, with cries of rage, and the robbers who violate the most sacred right of nations, that of the domestic hearth; you will then prove to all that you are the worthy successors of those who slaughtered thousands of their brethren on the night of St. Bartholomew; you will open the eyes of the blindest to the spirit and tendencies of the Romish Church; you will demonstrate to the most incredulous that you have completely renounced the Gospel which tells you not to do to others what you would not like done to yourselves; you will show to the most ardent of your zealots that you are the enemies of Him who said to Peter: 'Put up the sword in its sheath, for those who make use of the sword shall perish by the sword.'

"You do not wish that those who differ from you in religion shall have the right to speak; you excite against them the rage of riotous men; you cry for their blood. But really do you think that the people will leave you long in the possession of this power?

"Do you not see that the shoulders of this poor people are bruised and bleeding under the heavy and odious yoke you lay upon them? Do you not hear the low and threatening murmurs that come from the breasts of this people, when they see you drag from them their last farthings, for the souls of your insatiable purgatory? Yes, all these confraternities, all these medals, these indulgences of five, twenty, forty *sous*, but for which you extract the money from the poor as well as the

rich, will open the eyes of the people. Already many are persuaded that if you really did believe in the fires of purgatory, you would not wait until you got twenty-five cents to take a poor suffering soul out of that purgatory, no more than you would demand twenty-five cents to save a person drowning before your eyes. There are even those that blush for you, when they hear you say, in speaking of such a person, deceased, 'He is probably in purgatory, give me \$10.00 \$20.00, and I shall immediately try to get him out.'

"This shameful traffic begins to be understood and to be despised. The people see that the enormous sums they give you for the souls in purgatory remain at the bottom of your purses and that the good souls do not get a fraction. Continue your infamous commerce in prayers, indulgences and medals; build for yourselves with those funds, sumptuous palaces; rear up gigantic cathedrals; robe yourselves in purple and the finest garments; load your tables with delicate viands; knock down those who disturb your repose; and continue to elect in every country the enemies of the people. But mark well what I tell you: the people will soon awake from the profound slumber in which you have kept them. In spite of you, their eyes will be opened to the light which is coming in upon them on every side.

"But this waking up will be terrible, like that of the lion. This people who till the ground, with the sweat of their brow, have not a cent left; the poor people are nearly naked, and their children are trembling with cold. Many are obliged to leave their own country to go and eat the bitter bread of exile, and to be the servants of other people. But they will soon awaken, and they will say, 'I have now nothing left, I am naked, hungry, without shelter! Where are the goods that God gave me?' And a voice from heaven shall say to them, 'Behold them, there, in those magnificent palaces; there is the price of your hard labours, and the bread of your children. Under the cloke of religion, your priests have ruined you and made you their slaves. They have snatched away a thing

more precious than earthly treasure—the Word of God—the Divine Gospel that Christ has sent you to succour you in your wretchedness.’

“And then a disturbance will take place, but a terrible disturbance, and a frightful disturbance, such as is rarely seen on the surface of the globe. What you have done to others will be done to yourselves and in the same measure. In those days of agitation, of vengeance and retribution, the Canadian people, like the French people in 1792, will settle their accounts with you, and will make you pay dearly for your frauds, your impostures, your intolerance, and your tyranny. You will be dragged with violence from your palaces; and your mournful cries will be but the echo of the cries and desolation of your victims. Your blood will be mingled with the blood you have shed. Your reign, the reign of man, will be at an end, and the reign of Christ, the reign of God’s Word, shall have begun.”