

## CHAPTER XVII

**A French Officer Saves My Life at Beloeil. Grande Ligne and Longueuil Visited. Rev. Theodore Lafleur**

To throttle the Church of Rome, which means not only to dare her fury but to bring down her sceptre into the dust in the greatest citadels of her power, Quebec and Montreal, could not be the work of Chiniquy, it must be the Lord's work.

The mighty hand of my God was so visible in the complete humiliation of the haughty tyrants under the feet of whom the people of Quebec and Montreal were crushed for almost three centuries, that there was no possibility for me to be tempted by the the demon of human pride. I had only to be humiliated and amazed when considering that such a work had been wrought through such a weak instrumentality.

Protestants as well as Romanists were amazed that those so dreaded weapons—excommunication, interdicts, etc., fulminated from all the pulpits, which, till then, had kept the French Canadian people at the feet of their haughty tyrants—had suddenly been turned into ridiculous child's play, and had become powerless and been thrown by the people into the muddy ditches, along the public roads.

It was the first time, on the continent of America, that the Roman tiger had been so well shut up in his own den, and that the monstrous snake of Romanism had been so roughly handled without being able to bite the hand that was striking it.

No words can give an idea of the humiliations of the Roman Catholic clergy, when they heard that I was determined to spend another month in Montreal and vicinity in exposing their frauds, their idolatries and their corruptions.

Superhuman efforts were made by Bishop Bourget to bribe me, but he lost his time. He felt more and more every day that I was not only terribly in earnest, but absolutely proof against his threats, his perfidious flatteries, and his impotent rage.

By his orders, the priests invented and published the most horrible calumnies against my character. But in the good providence of God, these calumnies were invariably destroying themselves by their own absurdity and want of every one of the elements on which their fabrication could stand.

The gold medal they had put on my breast, the title of "Apostle of Temperance of Canada," they had so solemnly given me, the sacred silver vases they had presented me with the very day I had left Canada for the United States, the echoes of my voice which were still vibrating within all the walls of their cathedrals, the tears I had dried, the hearts I had consoled, the marvelous reformations I had wrought all over our country, the giant enemy of Canada, intemperance, which, by the help of God, I had conquered, were facts which, not I, but my God, was bringing to the memory of my countrymen, as an infallible antidote against the poisoned arrows thrown at me by the Bishop and priests, which poisoned arrows were wounding only those who were throwing them.

The whole week I spent in Montreal, after my return from Quebec, it was my unspeakable joy to see again my parlour constantly filled by the élite of my dear countrymen, who wanted to hear the Gospel message the Good Master was sending to them. I had also to bless God for the daily marks of Christian regard and kindness I received from the Protestants of all denominations. The evening lectures continued also to be attended by as many people as the large hall could contain, and this, without a single mark of public bad feeling from any quarter.

Friends and foes, Protestants as well as Roman Catholics, were equally astonished and glad at such an unexpected

triumph of the great principle of liberty against slavery; of fair play against brute force; and of truth against error; since, till then, the most deplorable as well as the most bloody riots had so often been a dark spot on the fair name of Montreal.

To the many who asked me how such a change could be seen, I answered, "This is the Lord's work. The hour is coming fast when the dark night of Popery will have to disappear before the shining sun of the Gospel. What you see now is the dawning of that blessed day. This is not my work, it is our merciful heavenly Father's work. Let us bless Him for it."

It would be too tedious to give the details of the different evangelical missions of the next month, in the district of Montreal. I will only mention two or three on account of some interesting circumstances connected with them.

A great number of Beloeil, Chambly, and St. Mathias people had requested me to give them a week of my time, and they had selected the splendid hotel of Beloeil Mountain for the place of the meetings, for that hotel had a very large parlour where several hundreds of people could easily be accommodated. Its manager was a true gentleman who had been an officer in the French army. He had attended several of our meetings in Montreal, where he had bravely and publicly given up the errors of Rome to follow the Gospel. I was then sure to find in that hotel the protection I wanted for myself and those of my dear countrymen who would come to hear me. I was not mistaken. The success of those meetings was again above my most sanguine expectation. The large and splendid parlour was filled from morning till night, by inquiring people of every condition, coming from every point of the compass.

But on the last days, a respectable farmer came from St. Mary to tell me that one of the priests had said in his presence to some of his people: "Just as you have a right to kill a wolf when crossing the prairie to slaughter your sheep,

so you have the right to kill that miserable apostate, Chiniquy, who is destroying our holy religion."

"Do not betray me," said the good farmer, "but be on your guard when you see a man with a red collar around his neck. He will have a pistol to shoot you if he finds his opportunity, for he is a good shot."

I thanked him, and I gave my secret to the fearless French ex-officer, that he might see the best way of protecting my life, though I asked him not to do any harm to the would-be murderer, if possible.

Among my hearers that evening (it was Saturday), I noticed a strong, tall man just before me not more than ten feet distant, with a red collar around his neck. His manners indicated that he was half drunk, and several times he made so much noise that I had to stop speaking on account of him. I had hardly given the last word of my address, when he made a quick movement through the crowd and stopped when not more than five feet distant from me. Then, with a horrible oath, he said, "This is your last heretical address."

Drawing then a pistol from his coat pocket, he pointed it towards me, uttering a new blasphemy.

But the French officer had watched all his movements and had remained close by him since he had entered the room. Quick as lightning, he drew his sword, and struck such a blow under the pistol that it flew almost to the upper floor from the hand of the would-be murderer, after the ball had gone and broken a pane of the opposite window.

This rash and daring act was followed by an indescribable confusion. Some of the women fainted, some were crying, but I had a number of friends who did not lose their presence of mind. With the sword at his back, that miserable tool of the priests was quickly driven, or rather roughly carried away to a long distance, where he received such a lesson that he was not tempted to come again.

The next few weeks were given to St. Pie, St. Mary, St. Athenase, St. Gregory, with the same crowds of Roman

Catholics who were trampling under their feet with the utmost contempt, the fulminations, excommunications and interdicts of their religious tyrants in their eagerness to hear the preaching of the Gospel.

At St. Mary it was my joy to address the large and so admirable congregation of converts which the zealous and fearless Baptist ministers of the Grande Ligne Mission had gained from Rome. That congregation, composed of thirty families, was then under the care of the late Reverend M. Roussy, whose name will be blessed as long as there will be a disciple of the Gospel in Canada.

I could not contain my tears of joy when I saw so many of my dear countrymen who had broken the yoke of Rome gathered in their comfortable chapel. These interesting converts, with their pastor, were among those I had most cruelly abused and persecuted when I was a priest of Rome. How happy I was, then, to have the opportunity of asking and obtaining their pardon! And how my heart was filled with joy when I could unite my feeble voice with theirs to bless the dear Saviour for His mercies towards us all.

The last place in Canada I laboured in before leaving for my dear colony of Illinois, was Longueuil.

In the midst of that important village, the Baptists had, then, a thriving mission school for Protestant and Catholic young ladies, under the superintendence of the Reverend Théodore Lafleur.

In the good providence of God, the Reverend Mr. Lafleur had been brought to the light of the Gospel many years before me, when he was quite a young man; and some wealthy Protestant, admiring his piety and his rare talents, had sent him to Switzerland to pursue a complete course of study.

Having returned to Canada several years since, he had consecrated himself to the preaching of the Gospel to our countrymen, with remarkable success. Though I had bitterly persecuted him, when I was a priest of Rome, I had become the object of his fervent prayers at the Throne of Mercy. He

had addressed me several letters full of Christian logic in the beginning of my public conflict with the Bishops, to show me that the only way to possess the glorious freedom and the Divine truths, which Christ had brought from heaven to save the world, was to entirely break the yoke of the Pope and accept the Gospel.

More than that, his burning zeal for my conversion had induced him to cross the thousand miles which were between us, in order to come to St. Anne, Illinois, and spend several days in friendly discussion with me.

Among the many gifts which Mr. Lafleur has received from God, is a wonderful treasure of kindness and affability to which his terse logic and truly admirable Christian spirit gave him an irresistible power over me.

When alone, after having spent one or two hours with him, I had to confess to myself that there was, in that so-called heretic, a perfume of piety I had never met in my church. I was also confounded by the irresistible power of his arguments, and the teachings of history to which I had nothing to oppose.

I am happy to say that the letters and the private conversations of the Rev. Mr. Lafleur are among the providential things which, by the mercy of God, helped me much to accept the truth when it came to my mind with its splendour.

I was, then, happy to have an opportunity of showing the Christian esteem and the gratitude I felt towards that true servant of God, in the two days I was his guest in his literary and evangelical institute of Longueuil.

Many citizens of Longueuil availed themselves of my presence in their village to come and ask me a thousand questions about what they called my new religion, and this gave me the golden opportunity of presenting to them the saving truths of the Gospel.

During the first night, a few Roman Catholic boys, sent by the priests, had caused us some trouble, by throwing stones through the windows and breaking the glasses. But the respect-

able part of the population were indignant at that act of brutal cowardice. The next evening they came in great numbers to hear the address I gave them, in the large hall of their village. And though they were excommunicated and thrown out of the Church of Rome by that very fact, they were so pleased with the proofs I gave them that their Pope, with his cardinals, bishops and priests, was a fraud, that it was twelve o'clock at night when they consented to be dismissed. Very few of that large meeting left the hall without shaking hands with me and heartily thanking me for what they had heard. And the perfect silence and tranquillity of that whole night, told us clearly that we were in the midst not only of a respectable and intelligent people, but among true friends, when in the village of Longueuil.

So it was that, alone, and, humanly speaking, without protection, I had been able to dare the power of Rome in her strongholds, Montreal and Quebec, for two months. But I was not alone. No! For the protecting hand of my God had been a visible shield over my head all the time.

The Gospel of Christ had been preached to at least 50,000 people, many of whom had never heard it. Several thousand Bibles or New Testaments had been distributed to people who had never seen them before. And the Holy Book was to remain there to feed the hungry souls, and quench the thirst of my dear countrymen.

Where could I find words to express my gratitude to my God for such a visible and constant protection through so many dangers and obstacles?

When going back to my dear mission of Illinois I could say with the prophet:

“1. If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, now may Israel say;

“2. If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us:

“3. Then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us:

“4. Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul:

“5. Then the proud waters had gone over our soul.

“6. Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth.

“7. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped.

“8. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” (Psalm 124.)