

## CHAPTER XVIII

### Admitted into the Presbyterian Church with the Bible Alone in My Hand

The fifteenth of April, 1860, ought to be a day never to be forgotten by the French Canadian disciples of the Gospel at St. Anne.

After we had broken the fetters which had kept us chained to the feet of the idols of Rome, in order to become the happy followers of Christ, we felt that we could not honestly continue to call ourselves Roman Catholics. We had to change our church name.

In a general meeting of all our dear converts, where every one was invited to give his views, we unanimously adopted the beautiful name of Christian Catholics, and we determined to give the hand of fellowship to all the different denominations of Protestants who would tell us that they were looking to Christ as their only Saviour, that they accepted the Gospel as their only rule of life.

From the beginning of our religious change my fear was that we were to make a new branch of the Christian Church and that sooner or later the new branch would be called Chiniquy's Church as had occurred more or less in the days of Luther and Calvin.

I was horrified at the thought and possibility of such an occurrence, and we determined to avoid it at any cost. We felt that there were already too many separate branches in the Church of Christ.

It was not long before we saw that our fears were too well founded; every one, even amongst the Protestants, instead of calling us by the beautiful name of Christian Catholics, called us Church of Chiniquy. The only remedy to this threaten-

ing drawback, was to connect ourselves with some of the neighbouring venerable churches, and we soon made our choice of the Presbyterian Church. For our intention was to form a sacred link with the martyred Christians of France known and blessed all over the world as Huguenots for having so heroically shed their blood for the Gospel cause. I showed to our dear converts that many among them were bearing the very names of those heroic soldiers of Christ, that probably the blood of many of those blessed martyrs was running in their veins.

Six elders were chosen to accompany me to Chicago, in order to respectfully ask the Presbytery of that grand city to give us the hand of fellowship and allow us to connect ourselves with that noble Presbyterian Church whose branches extend from one end to the other of the earth and whose shining Christian faith is a terror to Popery all over the world.

How happy every one of those venerable ministers felt, when, after the many questions everyone of them had to put to us, they found that our religious views were perfectly correct, and that the great religious movement we were inaugurating was perfectly Christian. They unanimously consented to receive us into the great Presbyterian family and offered their Westminster Confession of Faith for us to adopt, and thus declare ourselves faithful children of the Presbyterian Church.

They were, however, not prepared for the disappointment they were to meet, when I respectfully requested them to withdraw that book and to put the Bible in its place, as the only standard of our faith and life.

With an emotion which he could not conceal the moderator answered me, "My dear Mr. Chiniquy, we cannot do that. Our custom is that our venerable Westminster Book of Faith is the standard to which the new members we receive subscribe as the pledge they give us that they wish to become Presbyterians. We cannot change that rule."

I answered him, "Mr. Moderator, please do not forget that you have here to deal with babes in the faith. You must bear with children when they request you to give them the food which you are not accustomed to give to full-grown people. We do not come here to teach you any lesson, we want to be taught by you. However, we respectfully ask you to allow us to give you the reasons why we want the Holy Bible to be the only key which will open to us the gates of that Church of Christ of which He is not only the corner stone, but which is the blood of His blood and the flesh of His flesh. When we ask you to grant us the honour and privilege to become Presbyterians, it is not in a narrow, sectarian sense of the word, it is the large, broad sense of Christianity. We do not want to press only the Presbyterians to our breasts, we want to press all those who love and serve our Saviour Jesus Christ, and look upon Him as their only hope and their only Saviour, by whatsoever name they may be called. We do not want to be on the narrow platform, for instance, on which the Old and New Schools stand, and on which they fight against each other as wild cats. We want to belong to that large, Divine platform which our adorable Saviour presented to the young man who asked him, 'Good Master, what must I do to have eternal life?' We want a platform, in a word, on which we shall love as brethren, and press to our breasts as brethren and sisters, all those who, repenting of their sins, look to Christ and love Him as their only Saviour. Allow me to tell you that after reading many of the books published by the most learned men of your different denominations, we have come to the conclusion that your differences are more in appearance than reality. Do not find fault with us, if we respectfully ask you to allow us to believe that our adorable and merciful Saviour was indicating your different denominations when saying, 'I am the vine; ye are the branches; and My Father is the husbandman.' There is no need at all that the branches should be of the same form and the same size to bring good

fruits. The only thing necessary is that they should be well united with the vine. I got that assurance a few days ago, when reading that marvelous fifteenth chapter of St. John, under the shadow of a splendid vine which I have planted in my garden, and which I cultivate with my own hands. After reading with a prayerful attention these marvelous and mysterious words addressed by Christ to His disciples, 'I am the vine; ye are the branches,' I observed for the first time that there was not a single one of the branches like the other branches. I noticed for the first time a branch, a very near one, which was very large, just as your noble and great English and American Episcopal Church, and just at a very short distance I saw a small branch resembling your modest, though much to be admired Congregational Church. A little farther on there was a fine branch going straight up towards heaven, our ardent enthusiastic Methodist brethren, and just by its side I much admired another branch which was descending like our Baptist friends when they go down in their water baths. And last, though not the least, I had to admire some very crooked branches, as the beloved Presbyterians with whom we want to unite ourselves. But I remarked that, though all the branches of that vine were quite different in appearance, they were all loaded with splendid grapes; for they were all perfectly united with the vine!

"Evidently there are some varities of views between the many different denominations which form the Church of Christ. But so long as Jesus, and Jesus alone, the Son of God and the Saviour of the world, is their only hope, their only refuge, their only life, and His Gospel their only rule of faith, we want to press them all to our hearts as our brethren on earth, and our co-citizens in heaven.

"This is the reason that, though we entertain great respect for your Westminster Confession, we ask you as a favour to allow us to lay our hands on the Bible as the only door through which we wish to enter the grand and noble Presbyterian Church."

No words can give an idea of the attention and kindness with which my address was received and my request granted. The next morning found every one of the members of that Presbytery on their way to Kankakee City, by the Illinois Central Railway. There they found good carriages in waiting to drive them to the village of St. Anne, about twelve miles distant. The day was splendid and the grand scenery of the boundless and rich prairies, spreading on every side as far as the vision could extend, was magnificent. Our large chapel was more than crowded.

Multitudes of our dear converts had come from all the surrounding towns and cities, even from Chicago, to the number of more than 2,000.

It was as much with their tears of joy as with the words of their lips that the members of the Chicago Presbytery addressed them and received them all as the new-born children of the great Presbyterian family.

Words are inadequate to express the sentiments of joy and gratitude to God which were filling every heart in that solemn and never-to-be-forgotten day.

A new and glorious page in the history of the Church of Christ was written. The melodious voice of our bell was proclaiming far and wide the new victory of the Gospel. The angels of God were again singing their harmonious chorus—their hymn of joy:

“Glory be to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!”