

CHAPTER XX

Second Day at Muskegon. A Narrow Escape

The bright sun had hardly spread its rays on the peaceful waters of Lake Michigan the second day of my evangelical work at Muskegon when two of my dear countrymen knocked at my door to warn me of an imminent though unsuspected danger.

"Among your hearers last night," they said, "there was a young man called Bowker who, though half drunk, knew well what he said. He had not walked fifty feet out of the door last night, when we heard him swearing that your address against his Church was the last one you would give. He swore that he would shoot you dead, this evening, if you dared to continue to speak as you did last night. We come to warn you before it is too late. But please, when you will make use of our warning to protect yourself, do not speak to anyone of the friendly message that we bring you, this morning, for there is Indian blood in that young man. His great-grandmother was an Iroquois squaw, and he is as cruel, merciless and blood-thirsty as his savage ancestors were. He will kill us if he is aware that we have warned you against his vengeance." I answered them: "No doubt he has got from his priest the notion that it is his right and duty to kill me. In authentic Popish books it is positively said that it is not a sin for a Roman Catholic to kill a Protestant. More than that, it is said that it is such a good and holy thing to kill a heretic that all the sins of the man who would kill me would be forgiven instantly. When I left the Church of Rome I knew the cost. They have already tried several times to murder me, but they have failed. My hope is that the same

merciful heavenly Father, whose mighty hand has protected me, will be still my shield to-night. However, we must be prudent and take the precautions of common sense and wisdom against the threatening danger. I see that you are among the few soldiers who have been honourably dismissed from the army after serving your time. Please grant me the favour to follow my advice. I have been told that you have a half-dozen young French Canadians, honourably discharged from the army, in this town. Try to meet two or three others of them as friendly to me as you are, carry your guns well concealed under your coats when you come this evening to the meeting. Put yourselves around that young man and watch him closely. If you see that he makes any demonstration to do mischief, as quickly as a well-drilled soldier can do it, put the muzzles of your guns to his face, and sternly tell him, 'You are a dead man if you move a finger against Father Chiniquy or anyone else here!'

"You will see that the vision of those guns so near his face will soon change his mind; you will at once turn that wolf into a lamb. Do not do him any harm, but wrench his pistol or his dagger from his hand, and deliver him into the hands of one of the magistrates of the town, whom you will engage to come to the assembly for that purpose. Follow my advice with wisdom and see that he may not have any suspicion of what you are doing."

Those brave young countrymen followed my advice to perfection. In the evening the meeting was, if possible, still more crowded with my dear fellow countrymen who wanted to know why I had left the Church of Rome. My object that evening was to show them the sacrilegious and idolatrous worship of Mary in the Church of Rome.

After telling them that we should respect the memory of the mother of Christ as the most blessed woman who has ever existed, we ought not to call her the mother of God. I showed them that God being eternal and having no beginning could not have had any mother. That she was the mother

of Christ only as a man. That He had really taken His flesh from her flesh and His blood from her blood—but He could not have taken His Divine nature and His Divine person from her. No woman can be the mother of her father. The father must be born before the daughter. And Christ, as God, had no beginning—He had created this world. He was the creator of Adam and Eve. Christ could not be the son of any man or woman. “It is a remarkable thing,” I added, “that in the Gospel Christ never, never called Mary His mother. When addressing her or speaking of her, He always called her woman. More than that,” I said, “in two of the most solemn circumstances of His life, He refused to acknowledge her as His mother. There is that strange fact as narrated by St. Matthew and St. Mark . . . Here are the very words of the Gospel of Christ. When Jesus was speaking to the people, His mother and His brothers, who were outside, wanted to speak to Him. Someone told Him, there are your mother and your brothers standing outside who want to speak to you. But He answered the one who had told Him that, Who is My mother and who are My brothers? And stretching His hands toward His disciples, He said, here is My mother and here are My brothers. For any one who shall do My Father’s will, is My brother, My sister, My mother. (Matt. 12: 46-50; Mark 3: 31-35.)

“If it is such a holy thing to worship Mary as the Roman Catholics do to obey their Church, how is it that Peter, speaking of our Saviour Jesus Christ, said: ‘He is the stone which has been rejected by you.’ He is that principal corner-stone which you have rejected. There is no salvation by any other one. For, under heaven, no other name has been given through which man can be saved.

“When the Holy Ghost, through Peter, tells us that the name of Jesus is the only name through which we can be saved, what right has the Pope to tell you that the name of Mary must be invoked to be saved.”

These last words had hardly fallen from my lips when the

whole assembly was convulsed by the furious cries, "Infamous apostate: those are the last blasphemies which will fall from thy cursed lips!"

No words can give an idea of the terror and the confusion which followed, when the people heard these threatening words and saw the muzzle of a pistol aimed at me at such a short distance, that it nearly touched my face."

"My God! My God! Stop him! Stop him!" was cried from every corner. But quick as lightning the would-be murderer saw the muzzles of four guns so near his face that some of them even touched his skin; he heard at the same time voices telling him, "You are a dead man, if you move a finger. Let that pistol drop from your hand immediately, or your brain will be scattered to the four winds." These words were hardly heard by the would-be murderer when the pistol was dropped on the floor and putting his hands to his face, he cried with a supplicating voice, "For God's sake do not kill me! O My God! O My God spare me!"

My four young, brave friends, putting their hands on his collar told him, "You are our prisoner. Here is a magistrate who has been the witness of your criminal intention. We deliver you into his hands that he may deal with you according to law."

Trembling from head to feet, the young criminal answered: "For God's sake, do what you please with me, but spare my life. I confess that I am guilty of a great crime against you, dear Father Chiniquy, but I ask your pardon. Do not get me punished as I deserve." I answered him, "I do not want you to be punished as you deserve. But you cannot find fault with us if we ask the protection of the laws of our country to save our lives."

In less time than I can say it, by the order of the magistrate the hands of the young criminal were tied, and he was ordered to be marched to the common jail to wait for the course of the law about his criminal action.

The pistol having been picked up by the magistrate, it was

found that it contained four bullets which were to be lodged in my breast, if my merciful God had not protected me in such a visible way.

Of course the indignation of the crowd knew no bounds, and the unfortunate young man would not have gone back with his life, if I had not pleaded for mercy and stopped the arms of those who thought that the proceedings of the law were too slow for such a visible and public crime. It was only through exerting my influence to the utmost I had on that multitude, that I prevented a deplorable new case of lynch law. I had with me the ninth volume of the Theological works of St. Thomas. I opened it at the page ninety and I read them the following words of that author, which are nothing but the expression of the Church of Rome:

“Though heretics do not deserve to be tolerated we must wait till they are twice admonished, but if after a second admonition they refuse to repent and submit to the Holy Church, they must not only be excommunicated, but they must be delivered to the secular power to be exterminated.”—St. Thomas Aquinas, Vol. 4, p. 90.

After reading this law of the Church of Rome, I told my dear countrymen, “It is not against that unfortunate young man that you must express your just indignation to-day, it is against the Church of Rome. It was only to obey his Church and follow its teachings that he wanted to take away my life.

“I know on good authority that he spent the greater part of yesterday with his priest. There is no doubt that his nerves were strengthened to commit that crime, even at the risk of his life, by what he heard from him. He was told, what all the priests say of me, that I am a monster, unworthy to live, a cursed man, condemned to hell by Almighty God as well as by his holy Pope. He was probably promised the forgiveness of all his sins if he would put an end to my life.

“Whenever the Church of Rome has the power to do it she has persecuted the Protestants to her utmost capacity. She

has sent them to jail, she has confiscated their goods, she has sent them into exile, or even put them to death. Before the conquest of Canada by the English, it was forbidden to Protestants to live in that country. They had the choice between going to gaol or becoming exiles, if they persisted in their Gospel religion. In France, thousands have lost their lives, and have been forced to go and die in exile for becoming Protestants. In a single night, and the four or five months after the St. Bartholomew massacre, seventy-five thousand Protestants were slaughtered in France by the order of the Pope.

“The whole night would not be long enough to tell you the tortures, the persecutions, the slaughters of the Protestants, by the order of the Pope, in Italy, France, Spain, England, Holland, and all other countries where the Church of Rome was strong enough to execute the laws of blood and death she had passed against those who refused to worship her idols and prostrate themselves at the feet of her Pope and Bishops. You have seen with your own eyes, this very evening, one of the acts engendered by the bloody and cruel laws of Rome. Is it your desire to continue to belong to such a church?”

There was a universal cry: “No. We do not wish to be any longer the slaves of such a system of tyranny and intolerance.”

It was my unspeakable joy to see the whole crowd of my dear countrymen give up the heavy and ignominious yoke of the Pope in order to accept the Gospel of Christ for their only rule of faith.