

### CHAPTER III.

**My dear Bible Continues to lift Me up above the Dark Atmosphere of Romanism. The First Publication of the Holy Scriptures in Canada.**

The Christian reader of this humble volume will never understand the mercies of God towards its author if he does not remember that from infancy, through a miraculous providence, I was raised in the respect and love of the Holy Scriptures.

It is only by reading my first volume, "Fifty Years in the Church of Rome," that they will appreciate that fact, and that they will help me to praise the Lord for His infinite mercies.

When a priest of Rome, I never could reconcile myself with the restrictions put by the Popes and the councils on the reading of the Divine Messages of God to man through the Holy Bible, and I availed myself of the first opportunity I had to express my mind publicly on that subject.

For time and eternity I will bless my God for having granted me the favour of persuading the Bishops of Quebec to publish an edition of the Holy Gospels for the use of our countrymen.

In my daily conversations with the priests, I had brought many of them to my views by showing them that the very barriers put between the people and the Holy Scriptures would give to the Divine Book the irresistible attractions of a forbidden fruit, and that, sooner or later, our countrymen would ask and receive from the Protestant *Colporteurs* those very Bibles which we were refusing them.

During the four years stay in the city of Quebec, before my being appointed curate of Beauport, I had golden opportunities of being acquainted with all the priests of the dio-

cess, and those opportunities had been multiplied, when curate of Beauport, by my going to almost every parish to establish the societies of temperance.

As I was constantly gaining the minds of the priests to those views, my hope was increasing every day, that the hour was approaching fast when we would pull down the granite walls which past ages had put between our people and the inspired Book. That blessed opportunity was to come sooner than I expected.

The French Revolution of 1830, which ruined Charles X., had forced his cousin, Archbishop Forbin Janson, one of his principal ministers, to leave France and come to Canada. I felt at once that, if I could enlist his influence in favour of my schemes of temperance and of the diffusion of the Gospel among our people, I would more easily remove the obstacles which were before us for this triumph. Having completely, though secretly, at first, persuaded him to help me to fight the demon of intemperance, I opened to him my mind about the desire I had to see the Gospel of Christ read in every family of our dear Canada.

He answered me: "This is a very delicate question; I cannot take upon myself to initiate it, or to urge it upon the minds of the venerable Bishops who rule the Church of Canada, but if I am consulted by them on that matter, I will not conceal my mind. In my diocese of Nancy where our Catholics are mixed, as yours are here, with Protestants, we have found it impossible to prevent them from having access to the Bible. We have allowed them the Catholic versions, but with the Commentaries approved by the Church."

In the year 1841, after having blessed the column of temperance which I had erected at Beauport as a public memorial of the marvellous change wrought by that society among my people, that remarkable Bishop was asked to preach a retreat (a revival) to the priests of the diocese of Quebec.

Nearly 150 attended the exercises of those religious meetings in the Seminary of Quebec.

This offered the golden opportunity for which I was looking since the day I was ordained a priest. The very first day of that retreat I wrote a short and respectful address to the Bishop, to which I had secured the signatures of all the young priests to the number of nearly one hundred.

In that petition we were simply asking our ecclesiastical superiors if the time had not come when we could safely put the Holy Gospels, with the best commentaries, approved of by the Church, into the hands of our people.

Though at first the Bishop seemed to be taken by surprise, and a little embarrassed, he received us kindly, but with the condition that this grave subject should be discussed in one of our public meetings, and that every one of his priests should be allowed to give his own views thereon.

It was just what we wanted. As I had been selected to write the petition I was also selected to open the debate, which I did in the following words, which I have kept, and which I give here:—

‘ MY LORD,—VENERABLE BRETHREN:

“After the sending of His eternal Son, Jesus, to save us by dying on the cross, our great and merciful God has never presented to the poor sinful children of Adam greater proof of His Divine love and mercy than by giving them His Gospel.

“But as Jesus Christ was to be the Saviour of every one who would accept Him, so the Gospel was to be the light—the guide—the bread of life of every one who would accept it.

“As every man has a divine right to go to Christ personally, and as that right cannot be taken away by any church authority, so every man has the divine right to hear or to read the Word of God, when it is presented or spoken to him.

“As it was a crime on the part of the priests of Jerusalem to prevent the people from receiving Him, so I consider it would be a crime for me and for every one of us to prevent

our people from reading the Word of God—the Gospel of Christ—when they wish to have that privilege.”

I had hardly finished that sentence, when I was furiously interrupted by several old priests, who were at the right hand of the Bishop. “This is Protestantism; this is the doctrine of Luther and Calvin!” they all cried at the tip top of their voices. I asked the protection of the chair (the Bishop) against these interruptions and insults.

“Let my venerable opponents allow me to finish my short address, I said, and they will see that I am neither a Protestant nor a Luther. This interruption at the beginning of my address was as unfair as it is unchristian. If I say anything wrong, the venerable fathers who have interrupted me will have the opportunity of showing my errors. But is it not a sure indication that they find their position illogical, unchristian, when they show such a fear lest we discuss it?”

Then the Grand Vicar Demers (who had several times been the Superior of the Seminary of Quebec), advancing two or three steps towards me, and pointing his finger to my face, answered with a furious voice: “Mr. Chiniquy, you are a heretic, and a new Luther. You trample under your feet the decrees of the Holy Council of Trent. That Holy Council absolutely forbids the reading of the Scriptures in the vernacular tongue of the people, and you want us to help you in that heretical work! And you are so daring as to promulgate such a doctrine in our presence without allowing us to protest against your errors!”

“My Lord,” I said, “Please allow me to answer at once the venerable Superior of the Seminary of Quebec:

“I know very well that the Holy Council of Trent has put strange and deplorable restrictions on the reading of the Holy Scriptures not only by the people, but by the priests also. However, I am not here to condemn the ecumenical council or to invite you to revolt against its authority, as I am accused, but let me respectfully ask you, my lord, and through you this whole venerable assembly, to remember the circum-

stance and the times of the Council of Trent. Luther, Calvin, Zwingle and a thousand other heretics had raised a storm against our Holy Catholic Church such as the world had never seen. The spotless sails of the sacred ship were torn into fragments by the hurricane.

“The roaring and furious billows of the raging sea were striking the sacred ship from every side and even more than in the terrible storm spoken of by St. Luke,—Christ seemed to sleep and let the storm rage. . . . Whole nations had been swept away from the deck, and many more were threatened to disappear under the roaring billows.

“What was to be done in that supreme hour of anguish and peril?

“Have you not heard what is often done in the midst of destructive hurricanes, by the fearless and skilful mariners, to save the ship? Do they not throw overboard many of the most precious parts of the cargo in those hours of peril?

“Is it because they find those objects bad in themselves or because they have a peculiar detestation of them, they throw them overboard? No.

“It is often the contrary; they often throw overboard what they consider the most precious part of the cargo, the very objects they love the most. But do you not know what more than once the honest and intrepid captain with his fearless crew have done after the storm was over and the ship was saved?

“Have you not seen them, after, going back to the place where they had been so near to perish to pick up as many as they could of the precious objects and treasures they had thrown overboard? And when they had picked up and saved as much as they could of the precious objects which were yet seen floating on the surface of the calmed waters, have you not seen them making for the port of safety? And did they not bless God for having given them the opportunity of wrenching from the raging waves the very objects they had thrown overboard to obey the laws of a cruel necessity?

“My lord, and my venerable and dear brother priests There is no use of shutting our eyes to the sad realities of our present condition. We cannot read the history of the Council of Trent without shedding tears on the precious and sacred things thrown overboard to save the ship in those days of furious storms.

“I am not here to criticise and condemn the pilots and the illustrious, learned fathers of the Council of Trent. Nay, my tongue be forever silent and mute rather than condemn the holy men who were manning the sacred ship in those stormy days! Nay, my right hand be paralyzed if it is raised in condemnation against them.

“But now that the dear Saviour, as when on the furious sea of Samaria, has awoke from His mysterious sleep; now that He has stopped the raging waves and bidden the storm to cease, is it not the duty of every one of us who are forming the crew engaged by the Master to man the ship; is it not our duty to revisit the sea, when it is calmed, to pick up and save some of the precious things which are still floating around us, before they entirely disappear from our sight, and forever sink under the treacherous waves?”

The last words had hardly fallen from my lips when a burst of applause from the great majority of my hearers told me that I had touched the right chords of their intelligence.

But it was easy to see that the old priests, for the greater part, were still furious against me. However, not feeling hampered by their visible ill-will, I continued:

“My lord, among the precious and divine things thrown overboard in those days of trouble, which we must try to save is the unquestionable right which every Christian has to read the Holy Scriptures and interpret them according to his own honest conscience, guided by the Holy Ghost who is never refused to those who ask Him.

“For instance, who among us would dare to say that the admirable Epistle of Paul to the Romans was not the property of every Christian of Rome? Had not every Christian

of Rome the right to read and keep that letter thirty years after the death of Christ? And where do we find an authority to say that any council had the right to take away that Epistle from the hands of the Christians of Rome in those days?

“How could that letter, sent by the Apostle Paul as bread of life to the Romans of his time, be considered such a deadly poison by his successor, Paul IV., that it would be absolutely forbidden to taste it to-day by the same people of Rome?

“Are we really determined to continue to say to our people that that Saint Paul, who was so visibly guided by the Spirit of God had not common sense enough to write a letter to that people which they could understand? Can we find a single word in that letter of Paul to give us to understand that the people of Rome could not make use of their own personal intelligence and conscience, but that they had to borrow the intellect and conscience of their neighbour to understand him?

“What I say of the admirable Epistle of Paul to the Romans, I say of all the Scriptures. I thank God that I am a Catholic priest. I would not exchange the honour and the privileges of that title for all the gold and silver in the world. I do not revolt against our holy Church; I do not condemn the fathers of the Council of Trent for having done what they did to save the ship in the dark hours of the most terrible hurricane.

“But now our magnificent ship is sailing on a calm sea. Is it not the time to take again on deck the untold spiritual, intellectual, moral and Divine treasures, which Christ has brought from heaven to save the world?

“Ah! I wish my feeble voice could go all over the world and be heard by all those whom the dear Saviour had redeemed in His blood and who have accepted Him as their only hope, their only joy, their only life for time and eternity! Let them be called consecrated priests of the Lamb, or the

redeemed of the Lamb, it is the same in my mind. To every one of them I would say: 'Is it not time to enter again into the inheritance of the treasures we have lost? Is it not time to hold in our own hands and press to our bosoms the untold treasures which the Son of God has given us in the Gospel?'

"For remember this, the day you have sworn or promised in any way not to interpret it according to your own intelligence, your own conscience, guided by the Spirit and the grace of God, that Divine Book is an empty cistern; it is a cistern without water, it is water without substance, without taste, without life.

"You have not forgotten, my lord, that when I was ordained a priest, you asked me to make a most solemn promise, in the presence of God and His people, that I would never interpret the Holy Scriptures according to my own intelligence, conscience and common sense.

"With my hand on the Holy Bible, you made me swear that I would interpret it only according to the unanimous consent of the holy fathers.

"Now, I solemnly and respectfully ask your lordship to answer me: If I am too stupid, too ignorant, too much deprived of Christian intelligence to understand St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, St. John when speaking to me in the name of my Saviour, Jesus Christ, how can I be intelligent enough to understand Tertullian, Jerome, Augustine, etc., who are infinitely more obscure?

"Please, my lord, tell us, if St. John, St. Luke, St. Peter, St. Paul, etc., have not received from my God the light, the grace to speak to me in an intelligent way, when surely filled with the Holy Ghost, how is it that Origen, Justice, Clement, etc., have surely received from my God, a degree of lucidity and clearness refused to His ambassadors, His apostles and His evangelists?

"If I cannot rely on my own private judgment and conscience when studying, with the help of God, the Divine pages

of the Bible, how can I rely on that private judgment when studying the holy fathers?

“If you answer me that I have nothing else but my private judgment and intelligence to read, understand, and follow the holy fathers, how is it that I shall be lost if I make use of that same private judgment when I am at the feet of my Saviour, Jesus Christ, listening to His eternal and life-giving words?

“Nothing distresses me so much in our holy religion as this want of confidence in God when we go to our Saviour’s feet to hear or read His soul-saving words, and our so perfect self-confidence, when we go among sinful and fallible men, even called holy fathers, to know what they say.

“Would it be possible that, in our holy church, the Word of God means uncertainty, darkness, night, death; and the words of men light and life?

“When you, our venerable Bishop, did put the Holy Scriptures into my hands and commanded me to study and preach them, I understood what you meant, and I promised to do it with my best ability with the help of God. You gave me a most sublime work to perform, and by the grace of God, my whole life shall be consecrated to it. But when you ordered me to swear that I would never interpret the Holy Scriptures except according to the unanimous consent of the holy fathers, have you not forced me to be a perjured man by swearing to a thing which I could not do! Have you not made me, with every priest here, swear to do a thing as ridiculous and impossible as to take the moon into my hands!

“For it is very probable that there are not two chapters of that Divine Book on which there have not been some differences of views among the holy fathers. The writings of the holy fathers fill at least 200 volumes in folio, and it would require more than ten years to know on what text they are unanimously of the same mind, and on what texts they differ.

“If, after that time of study, I find that they are unanimous on the question of orthodoxy on which I have to preach, all

will be right with me, I will walk to the gates of eternity with a fearless heart. But if among fifty holy fathers there are forty-nine on one side and one of opposite views, in what awful distress I will be plunged! I shall be like a ship in a stormy night, after losing her mast, her sails, her compass and her helm! I shall be lost!

"If I were allowed to follow the majority there would always be a plank of safety to secure me from the impending wreck. But my oath, my terrible oath, has tied me and every one of you, my venerable brethren, to the unanimity. If our faith and the doctrine we preach is not that of unanimity, we are perjured, lost men!

"What a frightful alternative is put before us by that strange oath!

"The holy prophet, speaking of the Word of God, tells us: 'Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.' (Ps. 119:105.) But what are we doing with that Divine lamp and that bright and precious light?

"We put it under the bushel that it may not be seen! We are sworn to ignore and deny its power and authority. 'I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ,' said Paul, 'for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth.' (Rom. 1:16.)

"But, by our conduct, do we not really make the people believe that 'The Gospel is the power of the devil to damn the world?'

"Not only we prevent our people from having any access to the Divine Book, but we violently take it from their hands and destroy it under their eyes when we have opportunity to do it.

"By my advice, two years before I was curate of Beauport, four of the principal families of that parish had purchased, in Quebec, as many Bibles of Sacy, approved by the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris.

"But my predecessor, Rev. Begin, who is just sitting here, at my right hand, having heard of it, went, without an hour of delay, wrenched the sacred volumes from their hands, and

threw them into the fire, in the presence of the whole family.

“What we respectfully ask from you is, not only to put an end to these sacrilegious acts, but to show our love and respect for the holy Gospel by giving it to our people with the commentaries approved by the Church.

“It is evident that the fathers of the Council of Trent made those stringent laws against the reading of the Holy Scriptures almost in spite of themselves—with the understanding that those restrictions were deplorable things, and only to be in force for a short period of time. They wisely gave to every Bishop the right and power to destroy those barriers and to restore the natural right the people had to the Holy Book when they find it advisable.

“Then, it is not a revolt against the holy council we demand, it is only a favour which the holy council has allowed your lordship to grant, that we demand, in allowing a Canadian edition of the Gospel. And, relying on the zeal, the piety and the high Christian intelligence of our Bishop, it is our firm hope that he will grant us that favour.”

The way my address had been received by the great majority gave us the assurance that the God of the Gospel was on my side. Rev. Grand Vicar Demers, ex-President of the Seminary of Quebec, was the only one who tried to refute me. But he did not dare to touch a single one of my arguments. His address consisted in the hundred times repeated prophecy that Mr. Chiniquy, the young curate of Beauport, would soon become a Protestant if he were not yet one.

Thanks be to God, he was a good prophet.

Rev. Charles Baillargeon, then curate and some years later Bishop of Quebec, defended my position and in a splendid address on the right of the people to read the Scriptures, he closed the discussion.

When the votes were taken, only five dared to oppose us. The victory was complete. The Bishop at once named a committee to prepare the first Canadian Edition of the New Testament which was not finished until 1846.