

CHAPTER XXXV

Ballarat and Horsham. Riots—Narrow Escapes. A Woman Spits in My Face to Obey Her Father Confessor. The Muddy Ditch

Ballarat is one of the most remarkable and thriving cities of New South Wales, situated in a very rich and beautiful plain, where an enormous amount of gold has been found. The population, when I was providentially called to spend three weeks of evangelistic labour among its people, was about 35,000.

Unfortunately the Roman Catholic population was very strong, composed, as it is in too many places, largely of drunkards, thieves and murderers. The ~~pub~~ ^{pub} was filled almost exclusively with them, and they had furnished a great number to the penitentiary. *pub*

As soon as they heard of my going to their city, they determined, as they have done in so many other places, to prevent me from addressing the people, even if they had to murder me.

But, by the great mercy of God, the intelligent and Christian Orangemen of the city knew all their plans, and they were determined, at any cost, to defeat them.

My greatest difficulty, on my arrival, was to find a house to dwell in. The rumor was spread that that house would surely be destroyed by the slaves of the Pope.

At last, a respectable widow, who was living honourably by keeping boarders, offered me her best room and I accepted it. But my trunk had hardly been placed in the house, when a multitude of furious men surrounded it, pulled down the doors and broke the windows.

This was done whilst I was delivering my first lecture.

My first words to my friends after the lecture were, "Have

you saved my trunks?" They answered, "Yes, sir, they are all safe in the hands of a friend."

"Have you selected another house where I can be lodged without any more trouble?" I asked.

"Not yet, sir; but this will soon be done. But come and take some refreshments at a friend's house and then we will see where you can spend the night and the rest of your time among us, without any danger to your life, if not absolutely in peace; for you see the war is begun by the priests; it will be a war to the knife. But we are a match for them; if they want blood they will have it to their hearts' content. We cannot consent to be their slaves in our own dear city of Balarat."

We had not proceeded far when furious cries were filling the air all around us. Multitudes, armed with sticks and stones, were issuing from every side street to surround us.

"Boys," cried a loud voice near me, "be calm and steady. If you have to strike, see that every blow leaves its mark. Do not begin the fight, but let them begin it at their risk and peril."

Had I not seen that spectacle many times before, it would have been enough to fill me with terror. But I had seen that in Quebec, Montreal, Ottawa, Charlottetown. Many times I had had the opportunity of witnessing the heroic courage and the admirable intelligence and sang-froid of the Orangemen in presence of danger. And I knew my God was by me; I felt that His mighty and merciful hand would protect us all.

In that very moment, on our left, a numerous band of Irishmen, filling the air with cries of fury, rushed at us. At their head, a tall woman, brandishing a stick, ran towards me with the evident intention of striking me, but a terrible blow, struck on her face with a hard stick by my nearest Orange friend, brought her down on the pavement of stone.

It was a horrible sight to see that miserable woman, evidently half drunk, with her hair spread in the dust and her face awfully wounded and bleeding. She was crying like a wild beast, "Murder! Murder!"

At that very moment my nearest friend whispered:

"My dear Father Chiniquy, we are on the eve of a terrible and bloody encounter. Please do not remain here. There is too much danger for your life. Follow me through this narrow alley; my home is at the end of it. In the present tumult nobody will see us going that way. You will spend the night in a secret room where you will be absolutely safe from any danger, so long as there is a drop of blood in my veins."

Without losing a single moment, I followed him through that narrow and dark alley, and I found everything as my kind, noble-hearted friend had promised me.

The next morning the city was filled with the noise of that terrible riot. Nobody was killed, but there were many broken noses and black eyes.

The rumor, at first, was that I had been killed, but they soon learned that I was safe in the house of a popular and worthy Presbyterian minister of the Gospel, the Rev. Mr. Quick.

At first, the ministers of the city had determined to ignore me during my evangelistic work in their city, on account of the evident and terrible dangers which would accompany me wherever I might lodge.

But the wife of that worthy minister of Christ had told him at breakfast, "It is a burning shame to let Father Chiniquy expose his life in helping us to confound and fight the greatest enemy of the Gospel. We ought to give him a shelter under our Christian roof. Please go and ask him to come and spend the whole time he will be in Ballarat, with us."

That noble Christian lady came nearly paying with her life for her charity towards me.

That same evening, a moment after my coming back from lecturing, she was standing by the window, when her husband remarked that that was a dangerous place. "My dear," said he, "so long as Father Chiniquy is our guest, do not stand at night before the windows, for a pistol shot or a stone can come to show your imprudence."

Strange to say, she had hardly left the window to sit in a

safe place, when a volley of big stones went through that window, broke every part of it, crossed the room and smashed into fragments a mirror at the other end of the parlour.

It would be too long and tedious to give the details of that mission in Ballarat. Suffice it to say that it was blessed by fifty Roman Catholics who left their Pope to follow Christ.

I must not, however, omit saying that all our meetings were attended with more or less troubles of a dangerous character, and that the Orangemen put a guard of twelve fearless men to protect us every night.

But I cannot omit to mention a striking act of the priests of Rome against us.

The day I left, I learned, when at the railway station, that the trains were half an hour behind time.

When patiently waiting in the midst of many friends who had accompanied me to give me their last farewell, I saw a tall lady, splendidly dressed, advancing towards me at a double-quick pace.

My first thought was to move a little to the left side and let her pass, but she turned with me, and she was soon face to face with me. I thought she was a half crazy woman who wanted to kiss me. I felt ashamed and made a back step.

But she soon filled the distance I had put between her and me. Quicker than I can write these lines, she was again face to face with me.

Then, without giving me time to make a new back step, she threw from her mouth an immense quantity of dirt and spat it in my face.

I felt absolutely blinded, my eyes were utterly filled, and my face was completely covered with dirt.

In a moment she disappeared, running full speed.

The reader may imagine the surprise and indignation of my numerous friends at such a public and daring insult. Some of them went to get some fresh water and a towel to wash and cleanse my face, while other friends, with a policeman, were running after the strange woman.

Ten minutes later my face was cleansed, but my eyes were very dim. However, I could see enough to observe the indignation of the crowd.

The tall lady, trembling and pale as death, was standing by me, in the midst of the multitude by whom I was surrounded.

My secretary told me: "Here is the miserable woman who has just now so cruelly insulted you. What do you wish us to do with her?"

Looking at her, I said: "Is it not your Father Confessor who ordered you to do that action?"

With trembling voice she answered: "Yes, sir. It was my Father Confessor who ordered me to do that."

Then looking to the people by whom I was surrounded, I said:

"Did our Saviour order those who spat in His face to be punished? No. But He forgave them, so I do not wish this woman to be punished. Let her go back home in peace."

I forgave her what she had done me.

A few minutes later I departed on the next train.

After a few days of evangelistic labour in some of the thriving towns and villages around Ballarat, the good Mr. Cameron, of Horsham, persuaded me to go and spend a couple of days in his interesting town about one hundred miles distant.

All along the way I had again to admire the vast and so well cultivated fields, the splendid cattle, many thousands of sheep, waiting for the scissors of the shearers or the cruel knife of the butcher.

The splendid cottage of Mr. Cameron was fitted with all that good taste and wealth could offer to make a home pleasant and healthful. I really felt delighted when receiving the noble hospitality of that gentleman and his accomplished lady in that distant land. He took me at night to the church where I was to deliver my lecture. The distance was not more than two miles.

When on the way he told me, "We have nothing to fear, here, this evening from the Roman Catholics. Their village

is more than five miles distant from ours. They surely will not travel such a long distance to trouble us, and the few who live with us have always been peaceful."

"You must not rely too much on those circumstances to hope for peace this night," I answered him. "The Irish Roman Catholics, like the wolves of the prairies, can travel more than five miles to quench their thirst for mischief and blood. Though naturally good, intelligent, brave, hospitable and religious, they are turned into wild beasts by their monks and priests, not only in Ireland, but everywhere they go. Let us pray God to protect us this night, if your good minister and his people have done nothing to prevent the Irish from giving us new tokens of their cruel fanaticism. For such wild beasts, half drunk, it would not take much time to travel five or six miles to disturb our meeting if it is their priest's mind to do it."

My address was not yet finished when a volley of stones broke all the windows, struck me and many of my hearers.

Let the reader understand the horror of our situation when I tell him that, relying on the distance of the Irish village, not a single one had taken any weapon, not even a cane, to comfort and protect himself. We were absolutely in their hands and at their mercy, for they were evidently all armed with stones, sticks, etc.

Their usual furious and beastly cries were filling the air. "Kill him! Kill him!" was heard from all sides around the church. Inside the church the cries of the ladies and the supplications of many Protestants were the sad and only music in my ears, after my address.

Mr. Cameron came to me and whispered in my ear: "Do not go out of the church, for they are watching you, and they will surely kill you if they find an opportunity. The only way to escape I see is in a secret back door, of which, providentially, I have the key with me. They know nothing about that door. Go through it and walk straight on till you find a large and deep ditch, usually half filled with mud and

water. When there, walk the best you can towards your left. Keep your head down as much as possible, for though it is very dark, they might see you when they will cross the ditch in search of you. Walk nearly half a mile in that ditch, and then you will meet me with my carriage. I will be there in the dark, with Mrs. Cameron, waiting for you, and I hope by the mercy of God I will take you safely to my home."

A few minutes later I was in that ditch, which I shall never forget, though I might live a thousand years. I found it deeper and filled with more water than I had expected. In many places I had to crawl on my hands and knees in order not to be seen, for I was constantly hearing voices saying: "Where is he? Where is he?" when my would-be murderers were jumping over it some times at a very short distance from me.

Though I had hardly a mile to walk, or rather crawl, I found the way very long and exhausting. I was absolutely out of breath when I found myself at the end of it. I surely looked more like a frog than a man when they helped me to my seat in the carriage.

But we were not yet at the end of our journey. How can I tell you what our feelings were when we found that during our absence the beautiful and richly furnished cottage had been visited by my would-be murderers? When those faithful servants of the Pope had found that we were not there, and could not kill us, they had destroyed everything they could lay their hands on. The rich and beautiful piano was destroyed, the fine glasses on the walls, and the chairs and sofas were broken into fragments. They did not set fire to the house only for fear that the light would make them known when moving away from the spot.