

## CHAPTER IV

### *The Darkest Hour of the Night Before the Bright Rays of the Day*

The 10th day of January, 1846, the large parlour of the Right Rev. Bourget, Bishop of Montreal, was filled by a great number of priests, to whom he said, in substance, "I have invited you here to ask your advice on a most important and sad subject.

"You all know the efforts made recently by the Protestants to destroy the faith of our dear people. At first, their perfidious and underground work was so universally looked upon with horror by our countrymen that we hoped we had nothing to fear from those miserable apostles of error and irreligion.

"But to-day a dark and threatening cloud is in the very heart of one of our most interesting parishes.

"I have just learned that more than fifty young boys and girls, all children of our Catholic families, have been entered into the Protestant college of La Pointe aux Trembles at the very door of Montreal.

"If, every year, those fifty or sixty young men and girls poisoned by the errors and impieties of Protestantism are sent back from that school into the midst of our honest but illiterate population, who cannot see that they will scatter the poison of heresy and Protestantism into hundreds, even thousands of families of our good but so unlearned country people? Every one of those perverted boys and girls will be like sparks of fire which will soon be spread all over our dear Canada, and cause the ruin of our holy Church.

"We must not lose a moment in extinguishing those threatening sparks of fire.

“It was to ask you the help of your wisdom on the best way of counteracting the first efforts of those heretics that I have invited you to meet here to-day.”

As I had been working then only a few months in the diocese of Montreal, I felt that my duty was to let my elder priests give their views and I kept silent, listening to what was said, for more than an hour. Then the Bishop told me, “Dear Father Chiniquy, though you have been among us only a few months, you have worked four years within the city of Quebec, four other years in the grand parish of Beauport, and as long in the still more important parish of Kamouraska.

“In every one of those places, I know that you have met a great many Protestants, and I have even learned from the Bishop of Quebec that you have laboured with such zeal and success among those heretics that you have persuaded ninety-three of them to give up their errors and submit themselves to the holy Church. We want the benefit of your experience. We would like to know your views about the best way of paralyzing the efforts of the Protestants in their diabolical project of spreading their errors in the midst of our dear Catholic people.” Though this request took me by surprise, I was pleased with it. No words can give an idea of the prejudices, the contempt, nay the hatred which my theological studies, and my personal natural wickedness had accumulated in my mind against Protestants from the very day I had entered the college of Nicolet to that very hour of the 20th of January, 1850.

Though I am ashamed to do it, I really think it is my duty to confess that I was hating with a supreme hatred every English man and woman, for the simple reason that they were Protestants.

Such was, in the days of my youth, the impressions of the education given in the family, in the schools and in the colleges, that every Protestant was looked upon by me as a monster, born enemy of my religion, of my God and my country.

The books I had read, the lessons of my teachers in the college, and of my theologians in the Seminaries were all converging to the same result. These dark, infamous and diabolical sentiments made such an impression on my young mind, that, to-day, I am still filled with disgust and horror against my teachers as against myself when I think of them.

Under the full pressure of those sentiments I reminded the Bishop that the dangers ahead for our dear country and our holy Church were greater than many suspected. I added, "This is a war to death between those infamous heretics and our holy Church. It is a hand to hand battle, every one of us has to fight against those soldiers of hell if we want to save our country. In all her councils and through all her theologians of our holy Church, has she not forbidden us to have any communication with the heretics? Has not our holy Church told us that we must deal with them as with wolves which cross our fields to devour our lambs and our sheep? Does not our *Jure Canonico* tell us that it is not a sin to kill them, when we have our opportunity? What can I say on our duties and rights in reference to those miserable ambassadors of hell which you do not know?

"Let every one of you listen to the word of his intelligence, as well as to the voice of our Church about the best way of saving our dear Catholic people from the jaws of those roaring lions. I will say please let me go and preach to the people of La Pointe aux Trembles three or four days. Give me *carte blanche* to act and fight in my own way against those miserable ambassadors of hell, and, with the help of the blessed Virgin Mary, I will give you a good account of my humble efforts against them. My hope is that after those three or four days of crossing the sword with those ignorant and fanatical followers of Luther and Calvin, we shall not have much to fear from them."

My short address was received with the most frantic applause from the whole assembly.

After a few approving remarks, Bishop Bourget told me,

“Go, and remain not only three days, but much longer, if you wish to confound and pulverize those heretics. We will pray the Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist, the patron Saint of Canada, to help you. But be prudent, do not expose yourself in any way which might put you in the hands of the law.

“Do not forget that our misfortune is that we are a conquered people ruled by Protestant England, and we have no fair play nor any justice to expect from those heretics.”

A week later I was the guest of the curate of La Pointe aux Trembles, who at the demand of his Bishop, had invited me to deliver a course of three days lectures to his people against Protestants.

During the next three days the church of La Pointe aux Trembles was crowded to its utmost capacity, not only by the people of that parish, but by hundreds from the neighbouring parishes who wanted to know what I had to say against the *Swiss*, as the first French Protestants used to be called in Canada, because, likely, some of the first missionaries were Swiss.

My memory and my mind were stuffed in a marvelous way with all the ridiculous, abominable, diabolical lies published against Luther, Calvin, Zwingle, etc., and against all those who had accepted their reforms.

All those lies and calumnies were sincerely believed by me as Gospel truth (as they are generally believed even to-day by the priests of Rome). I gave them to the people with all the epithets and expressions of contempt and wrath that fanatical and blind zeal could inspire me.

My readers would hardly believe me to-day were I to tell them the historical lies which I gave those poor people as Gospel truth.

For instance, I told them how the Protestants of France, after having slaughtered thousands and thousands of defenseless priests, nuns and honest farmers, had sold their country to English Protestants who were coming to cover France

with blood and ruin, if the good, honest, peaceful, French Catholics had not been forced in self-defense to slaughter those bloody and treacherous Protestants in the St. Bartholomew night.

For, let the Protestants of Canada and the whole world know that this is one of the Romish historical lies and calumnies invented by the Jesuits, and accepted as Gospel truth by the great majority of the Roman Catholics.

"Look at the miserable heretics," I said to the people, "how they look peaceful, charitable, humble, to-day. Their voice is like the voice of the dove in their manners when they visit with you with their falsified Bible under their arms; they look like lambs. But let them grow in number, and they will do here what they did in France, England, Scotland, wherever they are strong enough: they will turn your houses and your churches into ashes, and they will slaughter you to take possession of your beautiful farms, if you dare to resist them!"

Really, the devil had taken possession of me, when I was proclaiming those horrible Jesuitical lies, which I believed then very sincerely.

For, let the Protestants who read these lines remember that this is the history as the Jesuits and the greater part of the Roman Catholic writers have given it.

What could be the feelings of my poor countrymen after three days of such horrible historical lies given them with a burning zeal by a priest in whom they had confidence?

Shall I tell it again? Yes! The devil had really taken possession of my heart. I was breathing nothing but hatred, vengeance and death against those defenseless and humble ministers of the Gospel. My hope was that I would make the ground so hot under their feet, in that parish and everywhere in Canada, that they could not dwell any longer in our land.

The last address was hardly finished the third day, when I saw five or six of those humble and zealous ministers of the

Gospel, or *colporteurs*, who had patiently and bravely attended all my meetings, with their Bibles in their hands, coming to meet and challenge me to have a discussion with them, promising to refute me before my people.

I was overjoyed when I heard them challenging me to a public discussion. It was just the trap in which my hope was that they would fall.

Instead of accepting their challenge, I turned towards the multitude, that had just come out of the church,—and I said: “Do you not see those miserable heretics, who come to challenge and insult you and me, at the very door of your church? Why do you not give them a lesson which they will never forget?”

A thought had evidently come from hell into my heart, in that hour, the darkest of my life.

I do not like to confess it, but I must. The intelligent reader understands that my intention was to have them so cruelly beaten, that they would either die there, on the spot, or be so cruelly treated that they would run away from the place, never to come again.

My cruel and cowardly intention was so well understood by the multitude that the words had hardly fallen from my lips, when forty or fifty young men, like furious tigers, threw themselves on those few defenseless men, and struck them without mercy.

In a moment their clothes were torn into rags, and their bruised and bleeding bodies were rolling in the snow, which was two or three feet deep on the ground. Very soon the snow was reddened with the blood of several of them.

With a word of my lips or a movement of my finger I could have put a stop to that horror.

But, alas, I was a true, a devoted priest of Rome!

The blood of those heretics was the most pleasant thing I had ever seen!

I was saying to myself, “Surely if they are not killed they

will run away, never to come again!" Very probably they would have been killed there, if the God of the Gospel had not come to the help of His heroic messengers.

A noble Roman Catholic French Canadian farmer, moved with compassion at the horrible spectacle which was before his eyes, cried out, "It is a shame to beat so cruelly defenseless men—I cannot bear that."

Then quick as lightning, throwing his coat and overcoat on the snow, he struck the nearest of the would-be murderers with his terrible fist, and sent him rolling down bleeding in the snow.

In less time than I can say it, he had applied his terrible fist on the bleeding noses or the blackened eyes of half a dozen of his cruel and mistaken Roman Catholic countrymen. And who will not praise the Lord with me, to-day, when I say that this heroic action was applauded by most of the people? The wounded and bleeding, but heroic, servants of Christ were at once left free to pick up their ragged clothing and run back as fast as possible to their lodgings.

Then, falling on their knees (as I learned ten years later from their own lips), they raised their supplicating hands to the Mercy Seat, and said to the dear Saviour as much with their blood as with their lips, "Dear Saviour, Thou seest our bruised bodies and bleeding wounds, and Thou knowest the one who has caused us to suffer as we do. We beseech Thee, look down on him in Thy mercy. Show him the error of his ways. Give him the saving light of the Gospel, that he may know and love Thee as his only Saviour; change that stone of the wilderness into a child of Abraham. Grant him to see the ignominious chains which tie him to the feet of the idols of Rome, that he may come with us to invite his poor Canadian countrymen to accept Thee as their only hope and Saviour for time and eternity."

And, blessed be the Lord, the prayers of those modern and heroic martyrs were heard at the Mercy Seat.

There has never been any doubt in my mind about the fact that, in the admirable providence of God, I owe my conversion to the fervent prayers of these six humble but admirable Christians, who had been so cruelly beaten at my instigation in January, 1850, at the door of the Church of Pointe aux Trembles.

The night after I had committed that criminal and shameful act, was spent in the parsonage of Longueil where I used, then, to reside with my intimate friend, Rev. Mr. Brassard. It was a sleepless night.

I was hardly in my bed when a voice more terrible than the roar of thunder was crying within my soul: "Are you not ashamed of what you have done to-day? Though by a real miracle those defenseless and honest men have not been killed, the blood they have lost, the cruel wounds they have received, cry for vengeance to God against you."

To silence those voices and excuse myself in my own eyes, I rose three or four times to read the theological books of my church and see again what she was teaching about the right of the Roman Catholics to persecute the Protestants.

I read in St. Thomas Aquinas, Vol. 4, page 99, that not only we should "not tolerate them, but that we must deliver them into the hands of the secular power to be exterminated." When reading these doctrines of the best and most approved theologians of my church, which were unanimous in assuring me that the heretics have no right to live, I persuaded myself that, after all, I had not committed any sin, when only beating men whom we had the right to kill.

It was then, that, for the first time, I heard a new voice within my soul which caused me unspeakable distress from that night to the day of my conversion.

"Do you not see that in your Church of Rome you do not follow the Word of God, but you follow the lying traditions of men?" It was for the first time in my life that the suggestion of leaving the Church of Rome had come to me with great force.

There was no doubt in my mind but that all the powers of hell were combined for my perdition. I fell on my knees and prayed to God to silence these voices which were shaking my faith. From the bottom of my heart I swore I would live and die in the Church of Rome, out of which (I sincerely believed, then) there was no salvation.

But, to prove to myself again that I had done well to get those heretics punished, and that my holy Church was right to teach us to hate, maltreat and even kill them, I took my Bible, with the hope of finding some of the texts which would prove to me that such were the teachings of the Scripture. Where can I find words to express my surprise and emotion when, on opening the Divine Book, my eyes fell on these words in Luke, Chapter 9:

“And it came to pass, when the time was come that He should be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem. And sent messengers before His face; and they went and entered into a village of the Samaritans to make ready for Him. And they did not receive Him because His face was as though He would go to Jerusalem. And when His disciples, James and John, saw this, they said, Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But He turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.” I had hardly finished reading this last sentence when as formidable a thunderclap as I ever heard, before or since, struck the ears of my soul, saying, “Do you not see that in your Church of Rome you do not follow the Word of God but the lying traditions of men? Where do your Popes and theologians find the right to punish, beat, imprison and kill the heretics, when Christ says the very contrary?”

What could I answer to my troubled conscience when hearing those awful rebukes from the very lips of Christ? I felt stunned and more than ever confounded. While sitting at the breakfast table the next morning, Rev. Mr. Brassard told

me: "Your eyes are swollen as if you had spent the night in tears . . . What does that mean?" "You are not mistaken when you think that I have wept, last night," I answered. "I have just passed through the most dreadful hours of my life. The cruel beating of those poor defenseless men has come to my mind and conscience under such colours all night, that I am really horrified at myself. In order to silence the voice of my guilty conscience I left my bed several times to read the pages of our most approved and learned theologians. Of course I have found them unanimous in telling me that the heretics are not worthy to live, that they have no rights which we are bound to respect, that it is the duty of the Catholic Church to deliver them into the hands of the secular power to be exterminated, that it is forbidden to speak to them, to work with them, or encourage them in any way.

"In your volume of *Jure Canonico* I have read again, that, not only is it not a sin to kill a Protestant, but that such a holy action gives the assurance of the pardon of all his sins to the murderer. More than that I have found that the killing of a Protestant by a Catholic is not murder. But this has not silenced the cry of my conscience.

"But to my unspeakable confusion my eyes have fallen on the ninth chapter of Luke, where our Saviour is absolutely in opposition to the doctrines and practises of our church on that subject. Then a voice more terrible than that of a hurricane had shaken my very frame, when crying in my ears, 'Do you not see that in your Church of Rome you do not follow the Word of God, but the lying traditions of men?'

"What could I answer when my conscience was telling me that this was the truth, the sad truth! But how can I picture to you my distress and desolation, when it seemed to me that God Himself with all His angels was crying to me: 'Come out, come out from that Church of Rome, whose hands are

reddened with the blood of ten millions of men she has slaughtered to establish her power over this enslaved, blind, perishing world.' ”

Mr. Brassard answered me: “My dear Chiniquy, with the hope, nay, the assurance, that you will never betray me, I must tell you that there are many things in our poor Church of Rome which I cannot believe; for they look to me not only against the teachings of the Gospel, but against common-sense. The right which our Church assumes to command the civil power to hang, burn, torture and kill the heretics cannot come from Christ. I am always struck with sorrow when I read the bloody pages of our Church history, which tell us how she has filled her dungeons with not thousands, but millions of honest men and women, and where they were starved to death or had to suffer tortures which would have horrified the savages of our forests. It is a fact that our Church has put to death millions of Protestants, because they could not believe certain doctrines which they, wisely or unwisely (God only knows), thought contrary to the Scriptures. To my mind and conscience, this is such a dark spot on the face of our Church that all the waters of our vast rivers and bottomless oceans cannot wash it away.

“I tell you my mind, my dear Chiniquy, far from admiring or approving you, when yesterday you told me how you had caused those brave and honest (though mistaken) Protestants to be so cruelly beaten, I silently condemned you from the bottom of my heart.

“Continue to spread your admirable views on temperance, but let the Protestants alone. Convert them if you can, with scriptural arguments, but give up forever the idea that we Roman Catholics have any right to beat them or shed their blood, because they cannot see many things just as we do.”

When uttering these last words, the voice of my noble friend was trembling, yes, there were tears in his eyes, and,

unable to conceal his emotion, he abruptly left the table and ran to his room.

This friendly rebuke found such an echo in my troubled conscience that I remained speechless, and then I also took to my priest's room. Leaving the table, I retired with the words ringing in my soul:

“Do you not see that in your Church of Rome you do not follow the Word of God, but the lying traditions of men?”