

CHAPTER XL

**Futile Efforts. Priest's Efforts to Reach My Bed of Sickness Frustrated.
Challenge to Archbishop not Accepted**

After a month of hard missionary labour in New England, during the fall of 1894, having caught cold, I returned to Montreal quite exhausted and sick, and consequently was laid up for nearly two months.

During that long illness the Roman Catholic clergy made special efforts to reach my bed, in order, evidently, to have some seeming pretext or ground to announce to the public that I had become reconciled to their Church. But their plan failed.

Suspecting what might happen, I had given strict orders, as I generally do in such cases, not to allow any priests or their agents to enter my room.

One day, however, in October, a lady by the name of De la Rousselière, of very respectable appearance, presented herself at the door of my house, and in a polite note begged an audience with me. As she seemed so much in earnest, and persistent, her request was granted. When ushered into my room, where my wife, one of my daughters and a friend were present, she asked to be allowed to see me alone. I told her that I did not wish to hear anything that she could not tell me in the presence of my family and that friend. Meanwhile, the door-bell rang again; and on opening, the servant saw a priest who seemed to be in a great hurry, and who said at once:—"Is there not a lady who has just come in? Please take me where she is; I must see her immediately." But the faithful servant said she could not do that, and directly she

called my son-in-law, the Rev. Mr. Morin, who on coming downstairs found himself face to face in the hall with a stout, jovial priest. "I am Abbé Marre of Notre Dame Church," he said, "and as I have heard that Mr. Chiniquy is very sick, I thought I would stop and see him; for we do not forget that he is a priest, and as such, he is considered to belong to our parish." Mr. Morin told Abbé Marre about the strict orders I had given not to allow any priest to come into my room, —but that he would be welcomed should he call on me when I had recovered.

Meanwhile, Miss De la Rousselière was entreating me to pray to the Virgin Mary, to be reconciled to the Holy Church, and to accept the ministry of a priest, etc. I told her that Christ was sufficient for me; He was my only Saviour and my only Mediator, and that I had no need of the intervention of any priest; that I had a horror mingled with pity for those poor slaves of the Pope.

On hearing that, she rushed out of the room and went down double-quick where she met Abbé Marre, and quite excited, exclaimed: "Oh Monsieur le curé, do not go to see him; he says he has a horror for your black gown!" The priest began to laugh, and went out, leaving the witnesses of that scene under the firm impression that the whole thing had been planned beforehand, but that the plot had been victoriously defeated.

Soon after that clerical stratagem, I was besieged by other zealots of the Pope, especially women, whose avowed aim was my return to the Church of Rome.

As all these attempts failed, the Jesuits, who consider themselves, and rightly so, the shrewdest servants of the Pope, thought they should also try their hand at my conversion. So they set about it, using likewise a woman for their agent, pretending that through her I had asked for their spiritual assistance; all this appears in the two letters I here insert. The first one was addressed to me on the 4th of November by Father Hamon, being as follows:

“College St. Marie, Montreal.

“Dear Sir:

“Mrs. F. X. Trudel tells me that you would gladly receive the visit of a father Jesuit, and she has shown me an envelope signed by Mr. J. L. Morin, appointing for an interview the first Sunday of November at half past two o'clock.

“Unfortunately at that hour I must preside at a meeting of the *Catholic Union*; but if it is convenient for you, I can be at your place at half-past four.

“Yours truly,

“G. J. M. HAMON, S. J.”

Mr. Morin, on receipt of the Jesuit's letter, perceiving that Rev. Mr. Hamon had been apparently misled, wrote at once the following reply:

“65 Hutchison St., Montreal, Nov. 5, 1894.

“To Rev. G. J. M. Hamon, S. J., College St. Marie,

“Sir:

“Mr. Chiniquy requests me to acknowledge the receipt of your letter, and to tell you that he never expressed to Mrs. Trudel the desire to receive the visit of a father Jesuit during his sickness; on the contrary, he told that lady last Saturday that it was sufficient for him to have the presence of Jesus; that he had no need of the presence of a Jesuit to die in the full assurance of his salvation.

“As to that interview I am said to have appointed for the first Sunday of November, here is the fact about it. That good Mrs. Trudel, who has put forth a great deal of untimely zeal to bring us back to the Church of Rome, began to extol to me last Sunday the great advantages of ecclesiastical celibacy. I then took the liberty to allude to the several irregularities and disorders occasioned in all ranks of papal hierarchy by compulsory celibacy, and I further pointed out to her that the Apostle Peter was married, that the Roman Catholic

clergy followed his example in that respect during several centuries, and that there are even to-day Roman Catholic priests who have their legitimate wives. All these assertions of mine appeared to her as so many errors and heretical propositions, that I could not defend in the presence of a priest or a Jesuit, she said. 'As well as in your presence,' I replied. 'In that case,' she added, 'will you allow me to bring here a Jesuit next Sunday to discuss those questions with you?' 'I have no objection if you wish it,' I answered.

"She then asked me to write on an envelope, which she held in her hand, the day and hour of that meeting and to sign my name, 'for I fear that my memory would fail me,' she said. This I did. But you see that Mr. Chiniquy is not involved in any way in all this affair, and I do not conceive how Mrs. Trudel could mislead you so much as to tell you that it was Mr. Chiniquy who had appointed an interview with you.

"However, if you are very anxious to know what Mr. Chiniquy thinks of the Church of Rome, what faith and joy he possesses in his Divine Saviour, you have only to tell me, and when he is well enough I will notify you.

"Of course I am disposed to defend the propositions which have horrified that poor Mrs. Trudel, and should you wish to come for that purpose, I would ask you to choose another day than next Sunday, for I will then be engaged.

"Yours truly,

"J. L. MORIN."

To be sure that this letter would reach its destination, Mr. Morin, accompanied by a friend, took it himself to the St. Mary's college and gave it to the doorkeeper of that institution, who said that Father Hamon was in, and that he would deliver it to him personally.

We thought that we had heard the last of that affair, but we were mistaken. True to his promise in his note, Father Hamon called on Sunday at half past four—to see me accord-

ing to the appointed engagement, he said. When told by Mr. Morin that he had written him a letter explaining all, he said that he had not received it, that the messenger must have miscarried it. "But I left the note myself at the college," said Mr. Morin. After such a hit, an ordinary man would have lost his countenance: Father Hamon was not disturbed by *so little*. After a very amicable conversation, he took leave of Mr. Morin, excusing himself for the intrusion—and feeling, doubtless, that *honesty is the best policy*, even in the conversion of heretics.

When God in His mercy had restored me to health, I thought it was my duty to send to the Archbishop of Montreal the following letter, which appeared also in the press at the time:

"Montreal, 65 Hutchison St., December 8, 1894.

"To My Lord Fabre, Roman Catholic Bishop of Montreal.

"My Lord:—

"Your besieging me with your priests and priestesses during my last sickness is the reason for my addressing you this letter.

"I am perfectly cured, my lord: my bodily strength is so perfectly restored that I write you this letter without the use of any spectacles, and my hand does not shake more than when I was only thirty years of age, though I am in my eighty-sixth year.

"Yes, my lord, I am cured, perfectly cured, though I have not had a single drop of your waters of Notre Dame de Lourdes and without going to the good St. Anne de Beaupré!

"I am cured, in spite of the maledictions and excommunications of the Bishops and the priests of Rome!

"And, what will puzzle you the more, I am cured, perfectly cured, without having accepted any one of your medals or scapularies—without even having bought any of your blessed candles which I might have bought from you for fifteen cents.

“But to prevent you from suspecting that the devil alone or some witches could have healed such a bad man as I am, I must give you the secret of that cure.

“May our merciful God grant that you may have recourse to the same remedy with the multitudes of our dear countrymen you are leading in the perishing ways of Rome.

“From the very day that I broke the chains which were tying me to the idols of the Pope, I put myself under the care of the best Physician the world has ever seen.

“His name is Jesus!

“He is both the Son of God and the Son of Man.

“He came from Heaven more than eighteen hundred years ago, to save us from all our spiritual and even bodily miseries.

“But His condition was, that those who wanted to be cured by Him, should not invoke any other name but His own. For His Apostle Peter wrote in His Testament those very words—‘There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.’ Acts 4: 12.

“His Testament is called ‘The Gospel.’

“These last eighteen hundred years, all the echoes of heaven and earth are repeating His sweet words:—‘Come unto Me, all ye who are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.’ Matt. 11: 28.

“‘Whatsoever ye shall ask in His name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.’ John 14: 13.

“‘If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it.’ John 14: 14.

“‘If a man love Me he will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him.’ John 14: 23.

“‘I am the True Vine; ye are the branches.

“‘Abide in Me, and I in you.’ John 15: 1, 2, 3, 4.

“‘If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to Me.’ John 12: 32.

“From the day I gave up the Pope to follow Christ, I have found more and more every day that the greatest joy, the

greatest happiness in this world, is to love and serve Him. I have kept myself then united to Him with all the faculties of my heart and my soul, as being my only Light, my only Strength, my only Wisdom, and I have always found Him true to His promises.

“But when I found that it was good to be united to that mighty and merciful Friend in the days of prosperity, I have found that it was still more to my interest to be united to Him in the days of trial through which I had to pass.

“He was my Shield when I was attacked by the thousands of assassins whom you or your priests have so often sent to take away my life, either with their pistols, or with their murderous sticks, or with their sharp stones.

“When those stones were falling upon me as hail in a stormy day, in the streets of Montreal, Quebec, Halifax, Charlottetown, Antigonish, Ottawa, etc., I was throwing myself into the arms of that mighty and loving Friend, I was pressing myself on His heart, and I felt secure as a little child when in his loving mother’s arms. I was invoking His Almighty Name, and it seemed I was feeling His merciful arms around me to protect me. I was hearing His sweet voice telling me: ‘Fear not, I am with thee!’

“And when I was escaping from my would-be murderers’ hands bruised, wounded, bleeding, I felt happy for having suffered something for the sake of that beloved Saviour who, on the cross, had shed His blood for me.

“But it is when I was attacked by the last terrible sickness that I felt the necessity of having that mighty and merciful Friend near me as my Physician. With Peter I cried, ‘Lord, save me.’

“And you may come and see with what merciful and mighty hand He has come to my help and cured me!

“You may readily imagine my surprise and sadness when at that very time I saw your priests and priestesses coming to tell me that I was out of the way of salvation, and that I was to be damned if I would not come back to the Church of Rome, of which you are a Bishop.

“For what had these priests of Rome to give me to take the place of that Divine Friend and Physician, Jesus, the Son of God, that I might forget that He was my only Hope, my only Life, my only Saviour, my only Refuge?”

“What did they offer me to prevent me from saying with Paul: ‘I do not want to know any other but Jesus and Him crucified’?”

“They had nothing but a few rags, called scapularies, and some idols of copper, iron and silver, probably found in the crumbling remains of the temples of Venus, Minerva, Bacchus and Jupiter!”

“Yes! what had your priests to give me that I might forget and forsake that dear Saviour Jesus, whose presence in my heart was, very often, making me so happy that I was not only forgetting my terrible sufferings, but was changing those sufferings into feelings of unspeakable joy?”

“They had to offer me a little god, only about one inch in diameter, made with a little cake baked by their servant girls between two heated irons.

“Be not surprised, then, if I have repelled those ambassadors of Rome with the utmost indignation and pity.

“Here, my lord, allow me a few remarks.

“Since more than thirty years that I separated myself from the Church of Rome, I have hardly been a single day, when in good health, without asking, supplicating, even challenging you and your priests to come and show me what you call my errors.

“Thousands of times I have told you that I would, with pleasure, go back to the feet of your Pope and submit myself to his authority, if you had the kindness to show me, before the world, that the Apostle Peter has ever been in Rome, that the present Pope is his legal successor, and that Peter with all your Popes has received from Christ the power to rule over His whole Church.

“I have requested you many times and I do request you again to-day, to show me, in a public conference, that your

Auricular Confession is a sacrament established by Christ, and that it has been always practised as it is to-day in your Church; and I pledge myself to show, from the authority of your best Roman Catholic authors, that it is of pagan origin, and that it is in use in your Church only since the dark ages.

“In that public conference, I will also ask you to show me the text of the Gospel which allows you to let the poor people burn in the flames of purgatory, because they have no money, when you so quickly draw out of that burning furnace the rich, who fill your hands with the gold which very often they have stolen from those very poor people.

“I will have another favour to ask you in that public conference.

“It will be to show me a Gospel text which allows you to send to hell, as guilty of a mortal sin, the poor man who in Lent has eaten a piece of pork not bigger than my thumb, and that you allow him to go to heaven as a true Christian, if he eats that piece of pork when it is melted in his soup.

“When at that conference, I will also ask you to show me the text of the Gospel which authorizes you to advise, if not to force, so many men and women (priests, monks, and nuns) to make vows of celibacy, and to promise they will never marry, when God Himself in the Bible is so evidently opposed to such vows, as you may see by the following texts:

“‘And the Lord God said: It is not good that man should be alone. I will make him a helpmeet for him.’ Genesis 11: 18.

“‘To avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife; and every woman her own husband.’ 1 Cor. 7: 2.

“‘Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils . . . Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats which God has created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.’ 1 Timothy 4: 1, 2, 3.

“ You have never been brave enough to come and discuss those matters with me so long as I was in good health and able to answer you. The only answer you have given has been to send murderers with sticks, stones and pistols to kill me. But as soon as you hear that I am so sick that I can hardly move my head on my pillow, you become brave, you besiege me with your priests under the pretext of showing me my errors and bringing me back to the Church of Rome.

“ But do you not fear that even your schoolboys will see that there is a lack of courage in you? Will they not feel that you have no confidence in your own cause?

“ When I was sick and unable to argue with your ambassadors, I refused to see them. But to-day, thanks be to God, I am well and able to meet and answer you; hence I challenge you.

“ If you were sincere in your efforts to bring me back to your Church, come to-day, and show me my errors. I will open you the doors of my house, and I will be the most happy man to receive you in my humble home, and to give you all the honour and respect due to your high position, and according to my own personal esteem for you.

“ We will meet and discuss as true gentlemen.

“ Bishops and priests of Canada, if you grant me the favour of that public discussion, I will also ask you to show me the text of the Gospel which told you to hang our heroic patriots of 1837 and 1838.

“ For the French-Canadian people have not forgotten that it was the desire of General Colborne to let them live, when the Bishop of Montreal, Lartigues, said: ‘ Hang them!’

“ You had excommunicated and cursed them before the battles! As much as it was in your power, you had tied and paralyzed their strong arms when on the battle-fields that they might not conquer, and not satisfied with that—when they were defeated, you ordered them to be hanged!

“ What crime had they committed, to be so cruelly, so unmercifully treated by you?

"Ah! they had so much loved their dear country, which is yours and mine, that they thought it worth shedding their blood to make it free!

"The stern voice of historical truth tells you that a handful of insolent tyrants had taken the notion that the French-Canadians were good only to draw their water and cut their wood. More and more every day they were trampling under their feet our most precious and sacred rights; they were not concealing their minds, that just as the negroes of the Southern States were destined to serve their white masters, so the children of the French-Canadians, conquered on the plains of Abraham, were fit only to serve their conquerors.

"The only crime of our heroic patriots was that they considered it better to die free men than to live slaves.

"Has not noble England, after the bloody days of St. Charles and St. Eustache, taken the defense of our patriots? Has she not applauded when her most eloquent parliament orators with Lord Brougham, Lord Durham, etc., declared that the French-Canadian patriots were among the noblest men of our age; that they had fought and died for the defense of their rights—and to prove it, has not that noble English nation granted to us all the rights and privileges for which those heroic countrymen of ours fought and died?

"Are you so blind and so ignorant of the history of your own country as to ignore those facts?

"Among the heroes who shed their blood in those days for you and for me, there was one who was the bravest among the brave. The pages of ancient and modern history have no record of any more daring and devoted soldier of liberty than Chenier.

"But why is it that the very name of Chenier still fills your hearts with fear and rage?

"Not satisfied with cursing that French-Canadian hero in his life and in his death, you want to degrade his memory, you want his body to be buried in the open fields with the carcasses of the brute animals!

“Why so?”

“It is only because the name of that heroic patriot is forever mingled with the love of liberty!

“You hope that by destroying the first you will make the people forget the second, for it is only slaves you want and only slaves you can rule.

“But you are mistaken.

“Wherever there is a French-Canadian heart on the borders of our majestic St. Lawrence River, it beats with a holy emotion at the spotless names of Papineau and Chenier. Every true French-Canadian, in spite of your fulmination, is proud of having had such an eloquent apostle of liberty in the first one, and such a heroic martyr of liberty in the second one.

“In spite of you the seeds of fraternity, equality and liberty which Christ has brought from heaven to save the oppressed nations from the hands of their tyrants, are bearing their blessed fruits in Canada.

“Whilst you trample under your feet those sacred seeds of liberty, the hour is coming fast when the French-Canadian people, with the holy Gospel in their hands, will settle their accounts with you.

“In that day your high citadels will crumble in Canada as they have crumbled in England, France, Germany, Mexico, etc.

“That day the French-Canadians will accept the Word of God to guide them; and that Word will make them free!

“Truly and respectfully yours,

“C. CHINIQUY.”