

CHAPTER XI

The Debts Paid

“He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.

“He shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.” (Isaiah 53.)

“He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32.)

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:14, 15.)

“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.” (John 12:32.)

As I dated the blessed hour of my conversion from the moment that my Saviour came to me as the one who had paid my debts and delivered me from the burden of my sins by taking them upon Himself, the only object of my humble labours and prayers since, has been to present that truth to my dear countrymen so clearly that they might accept it, and be happy as I was in its possession. What was then my joy when I found in the present marvelous mercies of God for us, the most admirable arguments and comparisons to make them grasp and understand that mystery of the love of God, as much as man can understand it.

The second time I came back from the East, loaded with the donations of our Christian brethren to our new converts, they had come to receive me at the Kankakee station in a tri-

umphal way, in order to give me a public expression of their grateful feelings. More than one hundred buggies and waggons overloaded with people, old and young, with flags in their hands, preceded my carriage on my way home. After saluting them and on reaching the town of St. Anne, I requested them to stop at the chapel that we might spend a few moments in singing some of our beautiful French hymns, and bless our heavenly Father for His mercies towards us.

After giving them some interesting details about the success of my last efforts in collecting what we wanted to save their properties from the hands of their creditors, I asked and obtained permission to put a few questions to them. Addressing, then, one of the most intelligent among them, I asked him if he had any objection to tell us what was the amount of his debt to the money lenders of Kankakee. "The amount of my mortgage," he answered, "was \$350 two months ago." "And had you anything to pay that?" I asked him. "I had not a cent," he answered. "You know how I lost my crops by the frosts and the deluge which visited us these last two years. My horses and my cattle had perished as well from the bad quality of the food as from the want even of that food." "Now, do you owe anything yet, to-day?" I asked him. With a voice half suffocated with emotion, he answered, "No, sir, I do not owe a single cent; my whole debt is paid. The broker whom I visited last week, to my great surprise and joy, told me that before starting for your last trip to the East, you went to his office and paid all that I owed. He added, that after paying the last cent, you had taken the note I had given him from his hands, torn it into pieces, and thrown the fragments into the fire in order that nobody could ever come against me with it."

Addressing the same dear convert again, I asked him: "Are you very sure that this is not a fish story and a deception? How is it possible that your debt is paid to the last cent, even before you knew it, when you had not given a cent?" He answered: "I am sure that there is no deceit,

no imposture, in that affair. The broker who told me that has no interest to deceive me. Besides that, I know that you have done the same thing for many others here around me. It is a well-known fact that our mortgages have been paid either by yourself or by the committee of which you are president, and that our colony does not owe a single cent more to the lenders of Kankakee; and we have no words to tell you our joy, our gratitude to God, and to the benefactors who have thus saved us from a sure and complete ruin."

After this honest man had given his views and expressed his gratitude in his simple language, I asked him if he did not find any comparison between this fact and the great mystery of the salvation of the world through Christ, which was the fundamental truth of the Gospel religion we had lately accepted. "Yes, sir," he quickly answered, "there is a great similitude between these two facts. For, just as our Christian friends of the East have paid our debts to the last cent, through you, so our heavenly Father had sent His Son Jesus to pay our debts to His eternal justice, by shedding His blood to the last drop, and dying on the cross. In both cases the debts have been paid, and the debtors saved from their creditors without paying a farthing. Our new Christian brethren of Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, have done for us in a material way what our Saviour Jesus Christ has done in a spiritual way for this perishing world."

Then one of the crowd in the back seats said: "The comparison is not quite correct, for when our Saviour paid our debts, He did not ask us to sign any obligation to repay that to other people, but the committee (called Chiniquy Committee) has forced several of us, and I, one of them, to sign a paper by which we promise to give a certain rent according to what was given us, to support a high school or college in our midst."

These unexpected remarks came as a thunderbolt in a clear sky and they seemed to make a deep impression.

I thought it my duty to answer and explain the mistake of

that good brother. "Do you not remember," I said, "that in the beautiful parable of the rich man who had remitted the debt of his poor debtor there was the secret but binding condition that the one to whom the debt had been remitted, was obliged to do the same thing to his debtors? So it is with you, my dear friends: do not think that the marvelous favours our heavenly Father has granted you do not impose any obligation upon you. The admirable Christians of the East are Protestants as you are to-day. With you they protest against the religion of Rome, which deceives the world by teaching that the sinners are relieved from their sins by going to confess to a priest and by doing penances, abstaining from meat on certain days or by gaining indulgence, etc. These new brethren believe, like you, that they were sinners. Through their sins they had contracted a heavy debt to the justice of God. They even believe that that debt was so great, that it was impossible for them to pay it. . . . But they believe, as you do to-day, that God so much loved them, that He sent His eternal Son, Jesus, to pay that debt, by suffering the most terrible humiliations, agonies and death. However, these admirable Christians of Philadelphia, New York and Boston, do not rest there. They believe that Christ has put upon every one of them an obligation to love you as He loved them, to help you as He helped them. They believe, in a word, that they have only performed one of their Christian duties in doing for you in a material way what Christ had done for them in a spiritual way.

"Now do not forget it. By accepting Christ and His Gospel for your guide, you have accepted the obligation to do to each other what Christ has done for you. You must bear the burden of each other. Your life must be spent in doing good to each other. The strong must help the weak, the rich must help the poor. The fathers, more than ever in the past, must consecrate their resources, not only to the material, but to the moral and intellectual advancement of their children. This is why the committee has wisely invited you to take the

public obligation to consecrate the interest of the large sums of money sent you, to the support of a high school or a college where your own children will learn to become good citizens and good Christians. Remark that it is not in favour of strangers and people at a long distance, but that it is in favour of yourselves (for your children are surely a part, if not the better part, of yourselves) that you have contracted that sacred obligation. It is the knowledge and practice of that law that makes the Protestant nations so superior to the Roman Catholics. It is to the knowledge and practice of that divine law of mutual love and charity that you owe to-day, the marvelous change of your position and the unspeakable joy which fills your hearts. Surely you cannot regret that the committee has invited you to accept that loving favour for yourselves and your children."

When I saw that these remarks had been well understood, I said: "This humble house of prayer, after witnessing our tears of desolation, is to-day the witness of our joys: I hope it will soon be the witness of our perfect consecration to the service of God and the salvation of our countrymen who are still under the heavy and ignominious yoke of the Pope. Wherever I have been, through the Eastern and New England States, I have seen an incredible number of French Canadian emigrants working in the factories. The greatest part of them has been forced to leave Canada to escape the tyranny and the rapacity of their Roman Catholic priests. For as soon as they have a cent in Canada, you know it well, they must give it for the souls in purgatory, scapularies, medals, images of saints—or they must give it to sing masses to get ruin if the weather is dry, or to stop the rain if there is too much of it. What then remains of their money is given to build splendid cathedrals with the palatial parsonages and numerics which cover the country.

"Though still nominal Roman Catholics their faith is much shaken. Many are free thinkers and infidels, for they have already too much intelligence to believe the mummeries of

the Church of Rome. But they know nothing of the Gospel, for they have no one to give them its Divine and soul-saving doctrines.

“Many of those dear countrymen have come to me and I could not refrain my tears of compassion when some of them have said, ‘Can you not come to teach us the Gospel as you have done in Illinois, or can you not send some one to do it in your place?’” The thought then came to me that it was an obligation to all here to grant them their petition. In the midst of so many new converts we must hope that the God of the Gospel has already chosen some to go and give the bread of life to those perishing souls. Are there not here some mothers and fathers who will offer their sons to the Lord for that holy work? Are there not here among you, our dear young men, some who will be happy to say to their Saviour, ‘Here, I am ready to go at any risk and peril to preach the Gospel to those who do not know it yet.’ Let some prayers go to the Mercy Seat in every family, from to-day to next Sabbath, in order to know the will of God on that solemn question. Though I have not a cent, to-day, in hand, for that great and glorious work, my trust in God is so great, that I pledge myself to find the means we want for the young men among us who will hear and obey the voice of heaven when calling them to spread the light of the Gospel among our Roman Catholic countrymen.”

And with a short prayer and the singing of a hymn I dismissed the people.