

CHAPTER XXIII

Antigonish Riot of the 10th of July, 1873

At a meeting of the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of the Lower Provinces, held in Truro in 1873, while the subject of the mission to the French Roman Catholics was under consideration, I was invited to address the Synod, and in the course of my remarks spoke at length on the subject of Romanism, and also of my recent and past work.

At the close of my address I received the thanks of the Synod, and was authorized to visit any of the congregations of the church, with whose pastors I might make arrangements, and to receive one-half of the collections which might be taken up at any of my meetings, the other half to be applied for the benefit of the Synod missions.

Under this arrangement I visited a large number of the congregations connected with the Presbyteries of Pictou and Prince Edward Island.

I was invited by my kind friend, Dr. Goodfellow, pastor of Antigonish, one of the most thriving towns of Nova Scotia, to give an address to his people. In this invitation he warned me that the great majority of the town was composed of Roman Catholics, but he said, "You have nothing to fear here. There is a Roman Catholic Bishop, a college and a nunnery, and a good number of priests, but they are all my personal friends." I answered him, that I would go with pleasure though I had no confidence in the tolerance and liberality of the Scotch Roman Catholics, and that the Protestants would do very well to be on their guard; but I was ready to face the rioters if we were to have a riot as I expected. Two days before leaving New Glasgow, where I

was lecturing, I received a letter dated from Antigonish, with the picture of a skeleton and a coffin, with these words: "Infamous apostate! this is what you may expect if you dare to come and profane by your presence the Catholic town of Antigonish."

When in Mr. Goodfellow's parsonage I showed him that letter; it made him laugh. "Ha! ha!" he said, "this is some schoolboy's trick to frighten you. The Catholics are all my friends here, priests and people, and many have told me that there is not the least danger."

"You do not know the priests of Rome. They are, in general, the greatest hypocrites and the most deceitful men you can imagine. It is when they tell you there is no danger, that there is the greatest danger; it is when they cry, peace, peace, that you must prepare yourself for war. They are not only deceitful men, but they are cowards, they want to attack you only when you are not on your guard, and unprepared to defend yourself." This made him laugh outright.

"I have been told," he said, "that you were brave, but I fear that you are not as brave as I expected, for you see danger where there is no danger at all."

"Well, when the riot comes and the stones fly round our heads, we will see who is the braver, you or I."

We dismissed the subject till the hour of the meeting. When it was time to leave, I asked Mr. Goodfellow to give me some strings. "What for?" said Mr. Goodfellow. "To tie my hat to my head so well that I will not lose it when the sticks hit it." He laughed to his heart's content and said: "I see that you have a terrible fear of the stones. I thought that you were more brave than that." "When the sticks and stones come you will wish to have my strings to keep your hat solid on your head." "Dear Father Chiniquy," he answered, "a brave man is not used to see danger where there is none." "You will understand the meaning of your words when your hat will go. I have been in the fire so many times that I know what I say. And no doubt you will be wiser on

the subject before the dawn of next day." Then like the old warriors who never went to war without their shield, I took my thick shawl which I always carried with me, and as it was a very warm evening Mr. Goodfellow could not understand why I wanted such a heavy garment. He only laughed at the reasons when I told him he would understand why when the stones would come on our shoulders. "That plaid has already saved my life several times, and it will probably save it again to-night. There is nothing like heavy wool to ward off the power of the stones when they strike the shoulders." I never heard a heartier laugh of contempt than his, at my unreasonable fear, but I was not disturbed by his jokes and I kept my shawl.

We found the church crowded and evidently one-third of the audience were Roman Catholics.

I had not spoken twenty minutes, when an old woman rose on her feet, and cried out, "At him, boys!" and instantly a number of young men rushed towards me, filling the church with their cries, "That's a lie!" Fortunately there was a good number of Protestants in front of the pulpit who at once formed an impassable wall between me and the rioters.

At the same time cries of "Fire! Fire!" were heard outside and inside the church, and the bells began to ring. Addressing myself to Mr. Goodfellow, I said, "You see, my friend, it is just as I expected, I cannot continue the meeting, the only thing we have to do is to go back home." In vain Mr. Goodfellow tried to show the rioters the infamy of their conduct, his voice was covered with the cries of "Fire! Fire!"

A few friends having come around me, with Mr. Goodfellow, we walked towards the door, in the midst of the cries "You are a liar! kill him! kill him!" At the door were several bloodthirsty Roman Catholics crying, "That is the liar! kill him!"

Then eggs began to be thrown at me from every direction. In a little while dozens had been disposed of. The reader may understand that I looked more like an omelette than a man. I was covered from head to foot; but fortunately they

were fresh eggs. Then I said to Mr. Goodfellow: "When the eggs are finished, we shall have stones." He answered me, "Oh, I hope not." The words were still on his lips, when a stone struck me on the breast, and I would have fallen on the ground had not two friends prevented me. A moment after a Protestant lady, who had stood by me all the time, hoping that her presence would make the rioters less brutal, was struck with such force with a stone that we thought that her leg was broken. She was carried into the first house by two friends who were near us.

During this time the stones were falling upon me from every side like hail in a storm, but my hat was well secured on my head by the strings, and the shawl, well wrapped around my shoulders, prevented the stones from cutting the skin and breaking the bones.

Then Mr. Goodfellow, frightened by the horrible cries and hail of stones, took me by the arm and said: "Let us run; they will kill us." I answered him, "Surely they will kill us. We will probably die to-night, but we must die like Christian soldiers, facing the foe. There is no use, they can run as fast as you or I." At that moment a big stone missing me struck his silk hat and it went like a feather before the wind. Then his head being uncovered was so badly struck with another stone, that he fell down, his face in the mud, crying: "My skull is broken! I am killed!" We helped him to get up. His face was covered with blood and the skin was torn. I was horrified at the sight and I thought that he would die. I turned towards the rioters and said: "You are a band of cowards!" I saw, then, very near us, four priests encouraging the rioters and laughing outright.

We would evidently have been killed there, if providentially we had not been at the door of a Protestant merchant, called Cameron, who, hearing the cries and seeing the rioters around us, opened his door and said: "You and Father Chiniquy come in and save your lives."

Mr. Goodfellow could hardly stand on his feet, but, though bruised from head to foot myself, I could with other friends

help him into the house, which was immediately closed to the rioters, who began to throw stones in the windows, smashing every pane of glass, and threatening Mr. Cameron to set fire to his house if he did not give me up to be hanged. Mr. Cameron said to me: "Do not fear, the cowards will not set fire to my house, for the strong wind now blowing from the sea would turn the whole town into ashes."

We immediately went upstairs on entering the house, and while waiting for the doctor, who had been sent for, I asked one of the elders to read the fifteenth chapter of John.

My soul had never been filled with such joy as then, when, bleeding and bruised for the dear Saviour's sake, we were hearing His sweet voice telling us, "Abide in Me; I will abide in you. I am the vine, ye are the branches. I will not call you any more My servants, but My friends. The servant is not above his master. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."

And on our knees we were answering Him: "Yes, dear Jesus, we will abide in Thee; come and abide in us, when wounded and bleeding we are suffering for Thy sake."

When the doctor was examining the wound of Mr. Goodfellow and washing off the blood, the rioters fixed a ladder up to the window, and three times came up with a rope to hang me. But every time brave young men with axes repulsed them, telling them that if they came up an inch higher they would split their heads. And the sight of the axes brandished above their heads was eloquent enough to persuade them to pass down the ladder.

We were besieged in that way until after one in the morning. Then they began to disperse, and Mr. Goodfellow, supported by friends, was taken back to his house, where his poor wife was half dead with fright. She had heard the cries and seen the excited multitudes running and crying, "Kill him! kill him!" The fact is that she died not long after from the effects of that terrible night.

It will be imagined what an effect such a brutal attempt at liberty of conscience produced on the public mind.

Indignant at such intolerance practised by the Roman Catholics in a Protestant province, nay in a Protestant country, the Presbytery of Pictou, voicing public opinion, protested publicly against that brutal assault, revealing such bloodthirsty hatred; took up the affair and instituted law proceedings, all against my will, for I told them: "So long as you give liberty of conscience to the Roman Catholics, it is their right to stone, persecute, and kill you. It is the law of the Church of Rome that they must exterminate the Protestants. It is not only their right, but it is their duty to kill you when they have the opportunity. You find this law in the decisions of their councils and their Popes, which has never been repealed. Besides you can never get the truth out of a Roman Catholic when his Church is in jeopardy, because he is ordered by his Church to lie, according to the Jesuitical doctrine, that the end justifies the means.

The result of the lawsuit proved that I was right.

The Presbytery took decided action in relation to the matter. The members made a strong effort to have the leaders in the riot legally punished; but it failed, as I foresaw and felt. Of course there were witnesses on hand who were ready to give testimony under oath, such as would suit the purpose of those who aided negatively and positively the cruel persecution. That reacted terribly against the Roman Catholics, and the Bishop and priests saw not long after that they had committed at least a great blunder against themselves. The Romanists have felt the disgrace and the bad effects of it ever since, and I venture to say that if I had gone to Antigonish several times since, there would not have occurred a repetition of the scenes I have described. No doubt that riot, and the persecution I suffered in Halifax, which I will give an account of, resulted in preventing any serious trouble of the kind since, in Nova Scotia, and other Maritime Provinces. I may say here that the wrath of man seems in this case to have been overruled for good. Such conflicts may be regarded as so many battles for liberty of conscience and free speech.