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FIFTY YEARS IN THE CHURCH OF ROME

CHARLES CHINIQUY

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Contents

[Chapter I](#)

[Chapter II](#)

[Chapter III](#)

[Chapter IV](#)

[Chapter V](#)

[Chapter VI](#)

[Chapter VII](#)

[Chapter VIII](#)

[Chapter IX](#)

[Chapter X](#)

[Chapter XI](#)

[Chapter XII](#)

[Chapter XIII](#)

[Chapter XIV](#)

[Chapter XV](#)

[Chapter XVI](#)

[Chapter XVII](#)

[Chapter XVIII](#)

[Chapter XIX](#)

[Chapter XX](#)

[Chapter XXI](#)

[Chapter XXII](#)

[Chapter XXIII](#)

[Chapter XXIV](#)

[Chapter XXV](#)

[Chapter XXVI](#)

[Chapter XXVII](#)

[Chapter XXVIII](#)

[Chapter XXIX](#)

[Chapter XXX](#)

[Chapter XXXI](#)

[Chapter XXXII](#)

Chapter XXXIII

Chapter XXXIV

Chapter XXXV

Chapter XXXVI

Chapter XXXVII

Chapter XXXVIII

Chapter XXXIX

Chapter XL

Chapter XLI

Chapter XLII

Chapter XLIII

Chapter XLIV

Chapter XLV

Chapter XLVI

Chapter XLVII

Chapter XLVIII

Chapter XLIX

Chapter L

Chapter LI

Chapter LII

Chapter LIII

Chapter LIV

Chapter LV

Chapter LVI

Chapter LVII

Chapter LVIII

Chapter LIX

Chapter LX

Chapter LXI

Chapter LXII

Chapter LXIII

Chapter LXIV

Chapter LXV

Chapter LXVI

Chapter LXVII

Chapter I

The Bible And The Priest Of Rome

My father, Charles Chiniquy [pronounced, “Chi-ni-quay”], born in Quebec, had studied in the Theological Seminary of that city, to prepare himself for the priesthood. But a few days before making his vows, having been the witness of a great iniquity in the high quarters of the church, he changed his mind, studied law, and became a notary.

Married to Reine Perrault, daughter of Mitchel Perrault, in 1803 he settled at first in Kamoraska, where I was born on the 30th July, 1809.

About four or five years later my parents emigrated to Murray Bay. That place was then in its infancy, and no school had yet been established. My mother was, therefore, my first teacher.

Before leaving the Seminary of Quebec my father had received from one of the Superiors, as a token of his esteem, a beautiful French and Latin Bible. That Bible was the first book, after the A B C, in which I was taught to read. My mother selected the chapters which she considered the most interesting for me; and I read them every day with the greatest attention and pleasure. I was even so much pleased with several chapters, that I read them over and over again till I knew them by heart.

When eight or nine years of age, I had learned by heart the history of the creation and fall of man; the deluge; the sacrifice of Isaac; the history of Moses; the plagues of Egypt; the sublime hymn of Moses after crossing the Red Sea; the history of Samson; the most interesting events of the life of David; several Psalms; all the speeches and parables of Christ; and the whole history of the sufferings and death of our Saviour as narrated by John.

I had two brothers, Louis and Achille; the first about four, the second about eight years younger than myself. When they were sleeping or playing together, how many delicious hours I have spent by my mother’s side, in reading to her the sublime pages of the divine book.

Sometimes she interrupted me to see if I understood what I read; and when my answers made her sure that I understood it, she used to kiss me and press me on her bosom as an expression of her joy.

One day, while I was reading the history of the sufferings of the Saviour, my young heart was so much impressed that I could hardly enunciate the words, and my voice trembled. My mother, perceiving my emotion, tried to say something on the love of Jesus for us, but she could not utter a word her voice was suffocated by her sobs. She leaned her head on my forehead, and I felt two streams of tears falling from her eyes on my cheeks. I could not contain myself any longer. I wept also; and my tears were mixed with hers. The holy book fell from my hands, and I threw myself into my dear mother’s arms.

No human words can express what was felt in her soul and in mine in that most blessed hour! No! I will never forget that solemn hour, when my mother’s heart was perfectly blended with mine at the feet of our dying Saviour. There was a real perfume from heaven in those my mother’s tears which were flowing on me. It seemed then, as it does seem to me today, that there was a celestial harmony in the sound of her voice and in her sobs. Though more than half a century has passed since that solemn hour when Jesus, for the first time, revealed to me something of His suffering and of His love, my heart leaps with joy every time I think of it.