



The Beast and the Bible

A tense silence reigned in the little cottage in Quebec. "Sir, you know the door by which you entered my house. Please take the same door and go away quickly!"

Pierre's father, Charles, had studied in the Theological Seminary to prepare himself for the priesthood. A few days before taking his vows, however, he witnessed sickening iniquity in the high quarters of the church. He changed his mind, studied law, and became a notary. Not long after, he married a young woman named Renee and soon little Pierre was born.

At about 4 years of age Pierre moved with his parents to a tiny settlement far to the north. No school had yet been established there, so young Pierre was privileged to have his own mother for his first teacher.

Before leaving the Seminary of Quebec, Charles had received from one of his superiors a beautiful French and Latin Bible. That Bible was the first book, after the A B C's, that Pierre learned to read. In this secluded little home school, Renee selected the chapters which she considered the most interesting for the young developing mind. Little Pierre read them every day with the greatest attention and pleasure. With no trivial, worldly amusements or exciting television programs to distract him, he came to love the Bible. He so much enjoyed several of the chapters, that he read them over and over until he knew them by heart.

By the age of eight or nine he had memorized 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 Savior as narrated by John.

Many precious hours were spent by his mother's side reading to her the sublime pages of the divine book. Sometimes she interrupted to see if he understood what he read. When his answers made her sure that he understood, she would often kiss him and press him close to herself as an expression of her joy. How the angels must have loved to listen in to these happy, sacred occasions.

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One day Pierre sat by his mother's side reading to her of the sufferings of the Savior. His young heart was so impressed that his voice trembled and he could hardly continue to speak. Renee, feeling his 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 Pierre's forehead. The two wept together and their tears mingled on Pierre's cheeks. The Holy Book fell from his hands, as he threw himself into his dear mother's arms.

No human words can express what was felt in that most blessed hour! It was a never to be forgotten hour. Two hearts were perfectly blended at the feet of a dying Savior. There seemed to be a perfume from heaven in those mother's tears which were flowing on her child. It seemed then that there was a celestial harmony in the sound of her voice and in her sobs. More than half a century later Pierre would still remember that solemn hour when Jesus, for the first time, revealed to him something of his suffering and of His love. His heart would leap with joy every time he thought of it.

Their home was several miles from the church, and the roads in rainy weather were very bad. The neighboring farmers, when unable to go to church, would gather at Pierre's home in the evening. Using a table for a platform, Pierre would often repeat the most beautiful parts of the Old and New Testaments. The breathless attention, the amens of the guests, and often the tears of joy which his mother tried in vain to conceal, supported, strengthened and encouraged young Pierre as he spoke before so many people. When his parents saw that he was growing tired, Renee would sing some of the beautiful French hymns with which her memory was filled.

When the weather permitted, Pierre's family along with the other farmers would hitch up their buggies for the ride to church. Arriving early, the farmers would take Pierre into their buggies at the door of the temple and request him to recite some chapter of the Gospel. With rapt attention they listened to the sweet clear voice of the child, giving them the bread which comes from heaven. When the church bells rang, they expressed their regret that they could not hear more.

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One beautiful spring day in 1818 an ominous event cast a shadow across the beautiful friendship Pierre had with his Saviour through the precious Word of God. Renee was singing one of her favorite hymns as she worked on the mending. Pierre was at the door, playing and talking to a Robin which he had tamed. Suddenly he saw the priest coming near the gate. The sight of him sent an uneasiness through his whole frame. It was his first visit to Pierre's home.

Hastily Pierre ran to the door and whispered, "The Curate is coming!" The last sound was hardly out of his lips when the Rev. Mr. Courtois was at the door, and Charles, shaking hands with him, gave him a welcome.

The conversation was animated and interesting at first. It was a real pleasure to hear him. But suddenly his countenance changed. A dark cloud had come over his mind, and he stopped talking. The silence which followed was tense and strained. It looked like the heavy hour which precedes a storm. At last the priest addressed Charles. "Mr. Chiniquy," he said, "Is it true that you and your child read the Bible?"

"Yes sir," was the quick reply, "My little boy and I read the Bible, and what is still better, he has learned many of its most interesting chapters by heart. If you would enjoy it, Mr. Curate, he will repeat some of them for you."

"I did not come for that purpose," the priest replied abruptly, "But don't you know that you are forbidden by the holy Council of Trent to read the Bible in French?"

"It makes very little difference to me whether I read the Bible in French, Greek, or Latin," answered Charles, "for I understand these languages equally well."

"But are you ignorant of the fact that you cannot allow your child to read the Bible?" replied the priest.

"My wife directs her own child in the reading of the Bible, and I cannot see that we commit any sin by continuing to do in future what we have done till now in that matter."

"Mr. Chiniquy," rejoined the priest, "you have gone through a whole course of theology. You know the duties of a curate. You know it is my painful duty to come here, get the Bible from you, and burn it."

It was too much for Charles to hear such a sentence in his own house. Quick as lightning he was on his feet. Pierre pressed himself, trembling, near his mother, who trembled also.

At first they feared that a violent scene would occur. Charles' anger at that moment was terrible. Then another fear gripped Pierre's heart. He feared lest the priest should lay his hands on the dear Bible, which was just before him on the table.

Fortunately, Charles subdued himself after the first moment of his anger. He paced the room with a quick step. His lips were pale and trembling. He was muttering between clenched teeth.

The priest closely watched all Charles' movements; his hands convulsively pressed his heavy cane, and his face gave the unmistakable evidence of terror. The pacing suddenly stopped. Charles faced the priest, and said, "Sir, is that all you have to say here?"

"Yes, sir," said the trembling priest.

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"Well, sir," added Charles, "You know the door by which you entered my house. Please take the same door and go away quickly."

The priest left immediately. Inexpressible joy flooded over Pierre when he saw that his Bible was safe. He ran to his father's neck, kissed and thanked him for his victory. And to pay him, in his childish way, he jumped up on the large table and recited, in high style, the fight between David and Goliath. In Pierre's mind, his father was the hero like David and the priest was the giant whom the little stone from the brook had stricken down.

Years later Pierre would say, "Thou knowest, O God, that it is to that Bible, read on my mother's knees, that I owe the knowledge of the truth today." That Bible had sent, to his young heart, rays of light which all the sophisms and dark errors of a misguided priesthood could never completely extinguish.