

A Model of Christian Constance and Fortitude  
Amid Worst Adversities.

This paragon of virtue was an Iroquois woman from the Onondagas, baptized by the Jesuit Fremin in 1670, at the Mission Saint Francois-Xavier of Laprairie, situated at the time on the south shore of the St. Lawrence, opposite Montreal, where now stands the important town of Laprairie.

This Mission, founded by the Jesuits in 1668 to be a haven of salvation for the Iroquois converts, was entirely composed of Indians from the Iroquois cantons, already baptized or aspirants to Baptism; it was not yet forming a community numerically important, but was already renowned for the fervour of its members, and their achievements in the practice of all Christian virtues...

That outstanding religious endeavor of these new Christians, was the reason why our Heroine had developed so great an affection for the place, and wanted so much to establish therein her permanent dwelling after her Baptism...there she would surely find a surrounding most favorable to the development of her religious sentiments, and as such in perfect accordance with her great piety.

She dreaded leaving a religious centre such as Laprairie to return amongst her compatriots in her native land. She was not fearing so much for herself but most for her husband who, still unbaptized, would be so much exposed to relapse into those pagan practices still prevailing at the time in the Iroquois Cantons; besides that, another pitfall still more alluring and ruinous would lay wide open before his steps: the whisky allure in which he would be so much in danger to give in, due to the great facility to secure like stuff from the Hollanders. Knowing her husband's propensity, she positively knew that he would not have will power enough to keep away from indulging in such drinks which means for his destruction of soul and body. Unfortunately she could not have her legitimate wish prevail upon the contrary opinion of her husband who was more inclined to follow the ill advises and damnable



sollicitations of his pagan friends from Onondagas than listen to the wise and prudent counsels of his wife.

It was with apprehension and repugnance that she resigned to follow him with her son, a boy of ten years old, to their native land in the midst of iniquity where paganism was still rampant. Also they had not been long returned to the Onondagas when things began to turn the way the woman had apprehended as regards her husband. Despite so many protestations on the part of the man to live according to Christian Standard and which he made before his wife and in the presence of the Priest, at their arrival in their native village, and then in proof of his sincerity, he even declared his willingness to be baptized immediately, were it that the Father consented to accord him that favor.

Nevertheless, the evil suggestions of the pagans for the fact that they suited better the evil instincts, had fatally more weight on his irrational senses and exercised a greater power over his mind to make him take to evil ways, than had the good counsels of his wife to retain him on the right path. No doubt, the man was sincere at the time of his promises, but the bad example and the continuous pressure his relatives or friends and acquaintances exercised upon him for living as he was accustomed to, like they do themselves. Saying to him that he was not French to live after the manner of the French and adopt their ways.. This perverse, sophistical reasoning soon overcame his too weak moral resistance, and despite all the efforts of his good wife, he deplorably gave way to evil....Having once given in, our man fell lower than if he had never believed at all, as often is the case with those having fallen away from the Faith. He took a definite stand against religion by becoming aggressive and from aggressive, a reviler of the Holy Faith, as of something too good for him; then from a reviler, persecutor with regard to his wife.



It is under the stroke of the persecution suffered from the part of her husband that this heroic woman gave proof of her constancy and fortitude in the Faith as found only in saints. Her husband's first step in the way of persecution was an intimation as to her having to quit the prayer and renounce the Faith. She remonstrated with him trying all possible ways to bring him over to better sentiments, but it was a waste of time. After remaining deaf to all sollicitations, he showed all the more his villany by adopting the ways of menace in declaring her excluded from his home would she persist any longer to be a Christian; and in case of her being obstinate in refusing, she could but expect from him the worst of treatment. Hearing his rash and draconic injunction, she firmly and unhesitatingly remonstrated saying that all these threats shall never have an effect to frighten her into obedience in such a matter as this; she appraised him of her esteemed, dearer than life itself. Since it gives to live forever in presence of the Eternal One. There upon she went to see the Missionary. After exposing her case, she assured the Priest that all the menaces of her husband will never wrest from her will any consent, nor perturb the bottom of her soul, satisfied said she, to find in this adversity a blessed occasion to suffer something worth while for the love of Jesus.

But her one great apprehension and sollicitude arising from this painful affair were concerning her young son. Were he to remain in custody of his father whom he had already separated from her in his intention to keep him with him. The poor child, she said, had already tasted the (eau-de-vie) spirited liquor at the sollicitation of his father. How exposed he is to become a lost soul in the hands of his father.



But she saw a way to withdraw him from this danger; it was when his father shall be away at war, they both then will manage to take a fugitive course to Laprairie, as to a port of security and salvation. Now the time had come for the man to act brutally toward his wife. Some days after he had chased and deprived her of her rights by espousing another woman, he tempestuously entered her solitary lodge, like a passionate man furiated by an excess of ingurgiting, wrecked everything he met across his way, and laying hands on his repudiated wife, he beat her rudely and mercilessly. The fiend would have gone further in his rabid mood, multiplying blows perhaps up to nothing short of a murder. But, through God's name, he did not go that far. The people from the surrounding lodges made aware by the noise, hastened to the scene of violence, and rescued the poor woman by freeing her from the hands of this wild brute. Her faith and reliance in God directed her steps to the Chapel where she met the Missionary who deeply sympathized with her in her awful trial.

Encouraging her to keep firm, telling her that God who was a witness of her struggle was recording in the Book of Life her forbearance into merit for her eternal happiness. Similar indignities on the part of the heartless husband continued for several days more. He only stopped after the victim's relatives had taken it upon themselves to avenge these inhuman treatments upon their author by beating him in the extremes.

After such an experience of married life, it is no wonder then if she henceforth preferred the quietness of single life, at liberty to devote her time to devotion with the unique material care of bringing up her young son according to conscience in the knowledge and fear of the Lord.

It was in such a laudible spirit for a higher standard of



Christian life that she refused all propositions of further matrimonial alliance made to her, replying, "Since it has been the design of God that I should reenter into single life, by the way of suffering and adversity, it is also my set purpose to remain my whole life so for God's service and Heaven's sake.

Now follows an account of another assault she was called on to sustain for the defense of her Faith and her allegiance to the obligations of her Baptism--a struggle or assault of a different character, by no means less fierce and demanding no less courage and steadfastness in the Faith. Her assailants henceforth were the Indian Medico-sorcerers. It was against that crafty and perfidious class of attackers that she had to place herself on the defensive with all the arms she could find in the citadel of her faith to conquer the palm of victory over that peculiar kind of attackers....

The first assault of the kind was on the occasion of her boy's sickness, and the second instance was on the occasion of her own sore. As soon as her son took sick, an uncle of hers, a very superstitious man, strongly attached to pagan worship and superstitious medical traditions of his nation, wanting by all means the boy to be treated according to Indian rites by the medicine man, made all pressure possible upon the mother to obtain her consent without which the boy was doomed to die as he maintained.

The professional man in the art of Indian medecine was a fake doctor supposeddly endowed with a magical power which he exercised by force on the body, at the location of the sore, after incision made, to extract alleged sortilages in the shape of a small bunch of wolf's hair, a dog's tooth, or a little rusty iron chip, or a small clipping of raw hide, etc., supposedly cast in the body by some malignant spirit, or by a mere wicked and



hainous person.....which things were called by the Indians of the time--okis--and according to pagan belief were to be extirpated from the sick person's as a condition sine qua non of restoration to health...

These treatments were infallibly accompanied with idolatric rites and ceremonies, at which sacrifices of dogs as victims were offered to Agriskoe, the acknowledged divinity among the old Iroquois, and the flesh of these canine holocausts served to guests in a banquet to his honor.

The dropping of leaves of tobacco upon burning coals for the smoke to ascend toward the sky as an incense in honor of the sun was also a common act of worship in like occurrences ....

The pagan healers, whom our Heroine's uncle had called of his own accord, were on hand in readiness for the healing process to commence; but the mother was there near her son. In virtue of her Christian Faith, she was prompt in interposing an emphatic protestation against all these machinations on the part of the pagan, declaring that if God wanted her son to die, no devil nor any sorcery function would ever cure him; and if He wanted him to live, the boy shall live without the futile aid of any sorcerer's incantations nor any ridiculous superstitious treatment. The boy went without the treatment, and did not feel any worse for it, since he recovered soon afterward.

The second attempt for the same objective made against our Heroine was provoked by a pain she had had in her jaw which forced the patient to neglect her housework...The same uncle of hers who was having his meals at the lodge, hearing angrily the consequence of this neglect, in his ill humour, urged her together with her



other relatives to call on the same healing personages. Her answer was always for the negative, enforced with the same arguments furnished by her Faith. But as they would never stop insisting, the woman, then, to put an end to their importunities, told them she would consent only assuming that the Black-Robe be consulted first. "It belongs to him," she said, "to decide if in my case I say accept these medical services without injuring my faith in God."

To settle the question, right away, one of the Indian doctors who was a relative of the suffering woman, started on incontinently to the Missionary, with the hope of a solution favorable to the patient. After a luxury of boasting words over the wonders achieved by the aid of his art which enables him to draw sortilages out of the body of the sick, he said, "How should there be any wrong by doing so for the relief of suffering people?" He considered it licit and therefore there should not be any opposition on the part of the Priest. "I will," he said to the Missionary. "I, would take pleasure in letting her suffer that way when we can afford her a quick relief with our medecine?"

"Why do you talk to me of cure?" the Father replied, "as if your artifice had any efficiency to operate real effects of the kind? Why do you mention demons or sortilages lodged in her jaw as the real cause of her aching?" To convince him of the insanity of his theory, he took small pincers used by dentists that most opportunately he happened to have about him, and followed the sorcerer to the patient. The Priest inspects the woman's mouth.. A cavity in one tooth indicated where to apply the surgical instrument. With a jerk the misgiving tooth was removed, and with it went as by magic the so importunate pain that had aroused so much of a strife about her...mightily trying to her Christian



Faith.

There was no need of any other argument to confound those farciful doctors who were quick in stealing away to digest in concealment their humiliating discomfiture. The Father came out after that surgical feat with the reputation, as a medecine-man, superior to that of any Indian medico-sorcerer in the country, and had especially henceforth, the monopoly of all the cases similar to this. The good woman in her zeal for the faith, took occasion of her cure to instruct her people, telling them that all the sicknesses attributed to sortilages are not the product of any malefice, not a bit more than her tooth-ache that was due to natural cause.

The benefit our heroine drew from the peculiar incident was a blessed liberation of all further oppressive pursuit on the part of the pagans, and the disappearance of all hindrance in the course of her devotion and religious duties. She was most exact in saying her prayers three times a day, to attend mass every day, and many other practices of devotion.

One morning, willing to enter the chapel to attend Mass, she failed in her attempt to open the door on account of dampness that morning. Rather than miss Mass she knelt down at the door in the rain, during the whole of the Divine Sacrifice, heedless of what the passersby might say or think. At last her heart's desire could be fulfilled when the blessed day came allowing her to return with her son to her beloved Laprairie village to live amid an entirely Christian community.

*J. Adhémar Chapdelaine, 51*