

# The Catholic Register.

"Truth is Catholic; proclaim it ever, and God will effect the rest."—BALMEZ.

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## BISHOP DE CHARBONNEL.

The Church in Ontario Fifty Years Ago

### Personal Recollections

My first acquaintance with Bishop de Charbonnel occurred in his palace on Church street, Toronto in September 1852. I shall never forget his warm hearty shake hand and the French accolade of welcome he gave me and a few others who had just arrived from France with no other view, as he knew



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well, than to give him whatever little assistance was in our power in the administration of his many and laborious duties. His stature was erect, tall and imposing; his eyes grey and piercing; slight traces of pockmark somewhat detracted from what must have been at one time a singularly handsome appearance, and nobility of birth and character was delineated in his every act and movement. His joy seemed unbounded at the sight of what he termed "Heaven sent help in the hour of need" and his grand rich voice could be heard resonant with gladness and boisterous mirth for several days after ward as he passed from room to room in his palace. Toronto diocese at that time extended from Oshawa in the east to Sandwich in the west, and from Port Colborne in the south east to Goderich in the opposite direction. The harvest however, was great and extensive but the laborers were few.

The amiable giant Father Proulx had charge in Oshawa. But there was no other priest found between Toronto and Lake Huron except a very old French priest in Penetanguishene named Ferne, who had given missions in his native country to the survivors of the French Revolution. This singularly unselfish pioneer missionary always refused even the smallest donation in money or kind from his Irish parishioners because, although he said Mass for them, he could not preach in the language they understood. Another aged and feeble old French priest, Father Musart, was stationed at Niagara on the lake. He and Father Grattan of St. Catharines had charge of the whole Peninsula formed by lakes Erie and Ontario, and Niagara River. Father Grattan, a sturdy, robust and whole-souled Irishman, had studied in France and been ordained there. He abandoned a very fine and lucrative parish in Brittany to cross the seas and devote his life and labours to missionary work in what was known in those days as "the

wild and inhospitable shores of Canada." Hamilton in those days was blessed with the presence and charities of the great old Vicar-General Gordon, whose remarkable life and long journeys over winter snows and through pathless forest are graphically described in Francis Maguire's book "Irish in America."

Father John O'Reilly, who two years previously had been stricken down with fever in Toronto and narrowly escaped its horrors with his life and a shattered constitution, was in charge of the parish of Dundas. He was more fortunate than Bishop Power, who had fallen a victim to the same fell disease from the same cause and had died a martyr of charity and episcopal zeal displayed in the emigrant fever sheds in this city.

Rev. Father Ryan was at that time in charge of Paris, Brantford and Galt, while Father Eugene O'Reilly, uncle to Father John of Dundas, celebrated Mass successively and alternately in the Gore of Toronto, in the old frame church on the 5th line, in Oakville, Albion and Oshawa. A very old priest, Father Riattigan, lived in Adjala and visited Alliston, Mono West Newmarket and Schomberg. These were all the secular priests, about ten all numbered, who aided Bishop DeCharbonnel to attend to the spiritual requirements of his scattered flock in a district that now embraces the two Dioceses of Toronto and Hamilton. Guelph enjoyed even at that time as it does to day the valuable services of the Jesuit Fathers—who were then also in charge of the Irish and French Canadian populations that inhabited Chatham and Sandwich and neighboring townships. There were no railroads in those days; yet Bishop DeCharbonnel visited not only every town and hamlet, but it is firmly averred that he left no family or log house unvisited or unbled by his presence in that extensive region.

On his arrival in Toronto he found St. Michael's Cathedral and a residence grand and palatial for those days, erected and equipped by his martyred predecessor at an immense cost. But he found also that notwithstanding all the generous subscriptions of the people and personal sacrifices of Bishop Power and his priests, a debt of 60,000 dollars yet hung over the administration. To liquidate this enormous debt besides meeting all current expenditures he was fully determined.

He said in presence of the writer of this article. "There are 60,000 families in my diocese. I will visit every one of them and ask one dollar from every head of a household. I will pray with every family at night, and wherever convenient, I will say mass for them in the morning. I know that I shall return to Toronto with all the money I require, and some to spare for my orphans and the House of Providence. I am determined to build on Power street." The good Bishop kept his word to the letter. Even away in districts almost inaccessible, by Georgian Bay and Owen Sound, along the shores of Lake Huron and Lake Erie in Essex County are old people to be met with who say "I remember Bishop de Charbonnel very well, he was in our house a long time ago, he blessed our children and left us medals and prayer books."

Rev. Father Schneider, a grand old type of the Teuton race, was Pastor

of Goderich and of all the surrounding country, that now includes the counties of Perth and Huron. He was a man of indomitable courage, iron frame and incisive logical mind. His missionary journeys and work extended from Berlin to Goderich, about 100 miles in length and breadth, and in all that vast extent of rural district, it may be truly said he upheld the Catholic Faith, not only among the Catholics of Irish and German origin but that also he commanded for it the respectful attention and homage of Protestants of both nationalities. He always wore the soutane, whether at home or abroad, and was never abashed by a tumultuous crowd. He was on all occasions and everywhere independent and fearless, and nothing pleased him more than to be called upon, even by Orangemen in a public hostility during his travels, to defend some point of dogmatic Catholic Faith. Bishop de Charbonnel could not find a more congenial compagnon de voyage in his Diocesan visitations. With a powerful black horse attached to a light covered rig, they travelled all over the western portions of the Diocese, and called at every house where a Catholic soul could be found.

Both Father Schneider and Bishop de Charbonnel reached the Patriarchal term of four score and ten. After many years of separation like Paul and Anthony of the desert, they met again in the feebleness of old age and died in the home of their birth in France almost at the same time and under the same skies.

Count Armand Francis Mary de Charbonnel was born near St. Etienne in the south of France, of noble parentage in the very beginning of the present century. His oldest brother was a member of Parliament under Louis Philippe, and sat in the Chamber of Deputies in the early days of Republic under the Presidency of General Cavaignac. When the revolution broke out in June 1818 he fell a victim to the fury of the communists and died along side of Archbishop Affre, who also went to the barricades and secured the blessings of peace by laying down his life for his flock.

Count Armand Francis Mary studied for the Church and entering the College of St. Sulpice in Paris he was ordained in due time and became a member of that justly admired and justly celebrated Order. He volunteered for the Canadian missions and was soon an exemplary inmate and energetic member of the Grand Seminaire at Montreal. He mastered the English language thoroughly, as to grammar and pronunciation and in a short time was the most attractive preacher in the city and the most zealous at the confessional and looking after the sick and poor of both nationalities. He was the favourite of the Irish Catholics, whose grievous wrongs won all his sympathies, and whose crying wants he attended to, as they landed sick and emaciated from the overcrowded and fetid emigrant sailing vessels. Soon the emigrant fever broke out amongst those who had escaped the horrors of the deadly contagion while at sea. The air was filled with lamentations and a cry of despair. Father de Charbonnel flew to the temporary sheds erected for the sick and the dying; he inspired courage everywhere; he confessed and anointed the dying; he brought relief and the balm of consol-

ing and cheery words to every bedside. It was at the very time in June, 1818, when his brother's life blood was shed for his country in France, that Father de Charbonnel for dear charity's sake and in imitation of the Good Shepherd, exposed his life a hundred times a day in the emigrant fever sheds of Montreal.

The saintly Bishop Power although warned of his danger by the attendant physicians, persisted in carrying religious help and comfort to the fever stricken in Toronto. He said repeatedly to those who dissuaded him,

"The good Shepherd layeth down his life for his flock." He succumbed to the dread scourge and the whole city went in mourning. The See remained vacant for more than a year when Father de Charbonnel was nominated for the dignity. He at first rebelled against accepting any such responsibility, and journeyed even to Rome, to cast himself at the feet of Pope Pius IX., and implore his Holiness not to impose so great a burthen on so weak a frame. The Holy Pontiff said, "now you are in Rome. I am master here. You shall not depart hence until you are consecrated Bishop of Toronto. I will be only too happy to impose on you the holy chrism with my own hands." When the newly consecrated bishop was leaving the eternal city Pope Pius presented him with a beautiful chalice. "What will you say now quoth his Holiness, are you still afraid," "Calicem Salutaris accipiam," replied the Bishop "et nomen domini in vocabo." "I will accept the chalice of Salvation and will call upon the name of the Lord" (psalm 115). Before his return to Canada he visited his alma mater College at Annazay and obtained permission for one of the Basilian Fathers to accompany him. Father Molony who had been for some years a member of the order acceded to his wishes and in a few weeks both reached Toronto early in August 1850.

A grand ovation was tendered the new Bishop. His family title of "Count" recommended him to the rich and the high stationed among the Protestant denominations, and his works of charity and self-sacrifice in Montreal procured for him a hearty and enthusiastic welcome among the high and low of his own flock. His grand rich voice rang out distinct and sonorous in St. Michael's Cathedral and all hearts were brim full of gratitude to God who had sent them so noble a Bishop to guide them and bless them.

From the very beginning of his Episcopal administration Bishop DeCharbonnel understood the necessity of providing ample and adequate means for the Christian training of the rising generation. He found the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Christian Brothers already established in Jarvis and Richmond streets. They had charge of the Parochial or Separate schools. The Ladies of Loretto under Madame Dease, Mother Teresa, with five nuns and seven boarders, occupied a house of diminutive dimensions at the foot of Bay street. These were small beginnings, but he was satisfied, as he foresaw that with the increase of Toronto's population, then 50,000, both institutions would naturally expand and grow in proportion with the city's growth and the country's expansion and prosperity. The wonderful success of both in efficiency and num-