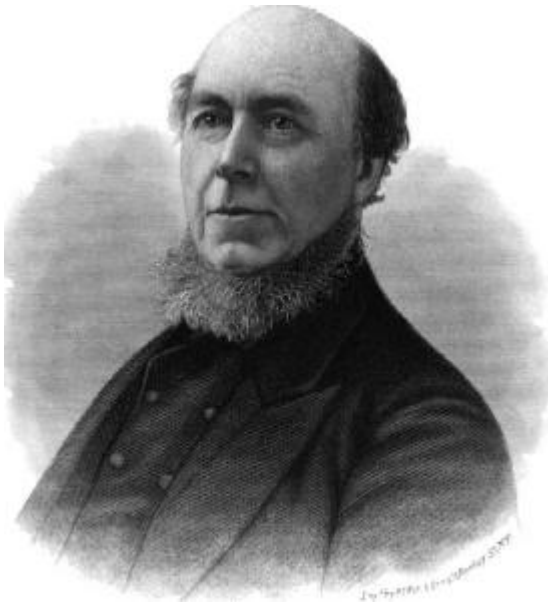


# Charles Chiniquy Leads an Entire Town Away from Alcohol



Charles Chiniquy

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If you have a drinking problem and are seeking aid, this story may just inspire you to stop drinking completely!

It's a slightly condensed version of chapters 33 & 34 of Charles Chiniquy's book, "[Fifty Years in the Church of Rome](#)". I find it an exciting account of how one man with the Power of God turned an entire town away from alcoholism!!

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The 21st of September, 1833, was a day of desolation to me. On that day I received the letter of my bishop appointing me curate of Beauport. Many times, I had said to the other priests, when talking about our choice of the different parishes, that I would never consent to be curate of Beauport. That parish, which is a kind of suburb of Quebec, was too justly considered **the very nest of the drunkards of Canada**. With a soil of unsurpassed fertility, inexhaustible lime quarries, gardens covered with most precious vegetables and fruits, forests near at hand, to furnish wood to the city of Quebec, at their doors, the people of Beauport, were, nevertheless, **classed among the poorest, most ragged and wretched people of Canada**. For almost every cent they were getting at the market went into the hands of the saloon-keepers. Hundreds of times I had seen the streets which led from St. Roch to the upper town of Quebec almost impassable, when the drunkards of Beauport were leaving the market to go home. How many times I heard them fill the air with their cries and blasphemies; and saw the streets reddened with their blood when fighting with one another, like mad dogs!

After weeping to my heart's content at the reading of the letter from my bishop, which had come to me as a thunderbolt, my first thought was that my misfortune, though very great, was not irretrievable. I knew that there were many priests who were as anxious to become curates of Beauport as I was opposed to it. My hope was that the bishop would be touched by my tears, if not convinced by my arguments, and that he would not persist in putting on my shoulders a burden which they could not carry. I immediately went to the palace, and did all in my power to persuade his lordship to select another priest for Beauport. He listened to my arguments with a great deal of patience and kindness, and answered:

"My dear Mr. Chiniquy, you forget too often, that 'implicit and perfect obedience to his superiors is the virtue of a good priest. You have given me a great deal of trouble and disappointment by refusing to relieve the good bishop Provencher of his too heavy burden. It was at my suggestion, you know very well, that he had selected you to be his coworker along the coasts of the Pacific, by consenting to become the first Bishop of Oregon. Your obstinate resistance to your superiors in that circumstance, and in several other cases, is one of your weak points. If you continue to follow your own mind rather than obey those whom God has chosen to guide you, I really fear for your future. I have already too often yielded to your rebellious character. Through respect to myself, and for your own good, today I must force you to obey me. You have spoken of the drunkenness of the people of Beauport, as one of the reasons why I should not put you at the head of that parish; but this is just one of the reasons why I have chosen you. You are the only priest I know, in my diocese, able to struggle against the long-rotted and detestable evil, with a hope of success.

Though far from being reconciled to my new position, I saw there was no help; I had to obey, as my predecessor, Mr. Begin, was to sell all his house furniture, before taking charge of his far distant parish, La Riviere Ouelle, he kindly invited me to go and buy, on long credit, what I wished for my own use, which I did. The whole parish was on the spot long before me, partly to show their friendly sympathy for their last pastor, and partly to see their new curate. I was not long in the crowd without seeing that my small stature and my leanness were making a very bad impression on the people, who were accustomed to pay their respects to a comparatively tall man, whose large and square shoulders were putting me in the shade. Many jovial remarks, though made in half-suppressed tones, came to my ears, to tell me that I was cutting a poor figure by the side of my jolly predecessor.

"He is hardly bigger than my tobacco box," said one not far from me: "I think I could put him in my vest pocket."

"Has he not the appearance of a salted sardine!" whispered a woman to her neighbour, with a hearty laugh.

Had I been a little wiser, I could have redeemed myself by some amiable or funny words, which would have sounded pleasantly in the ears of my new parishioners. But, unfortunately for me, that wisdom is not among the gifts I received. After a couple of hours of auction, a large cloth was suddenly removed from a long table, and presented to our sight an incredible number of

wine and beer glasses, of empty decanters and bottles, of all sizes and quality. This brought a burst of laughter and clapping of hands from almost every one. All eyes were turned towards me, and I heard from hundreds of lips: "This is for you, Mr. Chiniquy." Without weighing my words, I instantly answered: "I do not come to Beauport to buy wine glasses and bottles, but to *break them.*"

These words fell upon their ears as a spark of fire on a train of powder. Nine-tenths of that multitude, without being very drunk, had emptied from four to ten glasses of beer or rum, which Rev. Mr. Begin himself was offering them in a corner of the parsonage. A real deluge of insults and cursings overwhelmed me; and I soon saw that the best thing I could do was to leave the place without noise, and by the shortest way.

I immediately went to the bishop's place, to try again to persuade his lordship to put another curate at the head of such a people. "You see, my lord," I said, "that by my indiscreet and rash answer I have for ever lost the respect and confidence of that people. They already hate me; their brutal cursings have fallen upon me like balls of fire. I prefer to be carried to my grave next Sabbath, than have to address such a degraded people. I feel that I have neither the moral nor the physical power to do any good there."

"I differ from you," replied the bishop. "Evidently the people wanted to try your mettle, by inviting you to buy those glasses, and you would have lost yourself by yielding to their desire. Now they have seen that you are brave and fearless. It is just what the people of Beauport want; I have known them for a long time. It is true that they are drunkards; but, apart from that vice, there is not a nobler people under heaven. They have, literally, no education, but they possess marvelous common sense, and have many noble and redeeming qualities, which you will soon find out.

Next Sunday was a splendid day, and the church of Beauport was filled to its utmost capacity by the people, eager to see and hear, for the first time, their new pastor. I had spent the last three days in prayers and fastings. God knows that never a priest, nor any minister of the Gospel, ascended the pulpit with more exalted views of his sublime functions than I did that day, and never a messenger of the Gospel had been more terrified than I was, when in that pulpit, by the consciousness of his own demerits, inability and incompetency, in the face of the tremendous responsibilities of his position.

After the sermon, I told them: "I have a favour to ask of you. As it is the first, I hope you will not rebuke me. I have just now given you some of the duties of your poor young curate towards you; I want you to come again this afternoon at half-past two o'clock, that I may give you some of your duties towards your pastor." At the appointed hour the church was still more crowded than in the morning, and it seemed to me that my merciful God blessed still more that second address than the first.

The text was: "When he (the shepherd) putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him; for they know his voice" (Jno. x. 4).

Those two sermons on the Sabbath were a startling innovation in the Roman

Catholic Church of Canada, which brought upon me, at once, many bitter remarks from the bishop and surrounding curates. Their unanimous verdict was that I wanted to become a little reformer. They had not the least doubt that in my pride I wanted to show the people "that I was the most zealous priest of the country." This was not only whispered from ear to ear among the clergy, but several times it was thrown into my face in the most insulting manner. However, my God knew that my only motives were, first, to keep my people away from the taverns, by having them before their altars during the greatest part of the Sabbath day; second, to impress more on their minds the great saving and regenerating truths I preached, by presenting them twice in the same day under different aspects. I found such benefits from those two sermons, that I continued the practice during the four years I remained in Beauport, though I had to suffer and hear, in silence, many humiliating and cutting remarks from many co-priests.

I had not been more than three months at the head of that parish, when I determined to organize a temperance society on the same principles as Father Mathew, in Ireland. I opened my mind, at first, on that subject to the bishop, with the hope that he would throw the influence of his position in favour of the new association, but, to my great dismay and surprise, not only did he turn my project into ridicule, but absolutely forbade me to think any more of such an innovation. **"These temperance societies are a Protestant scheme,"** he said. "Preach against drunkenness, but let the respectable people who are not drunkards alone. St. Paul advised his disciple Timothy to drink wine. Do not try to be more zealous than they were in those apostolic days."

I left the bishop much disappointed, but did not give up my plan. It seemed to me if I could gain the neighbouring priests to join with me in my crusade I wanted to preach against the usage of intoxicating drinks, we might bring about a glorious reform in Canada, as Father Mathew was doing in Ireland. But the priests, without a single exception, laughed at me, turned my plans into ridicule, and requested me, in the name of common sense, never to speak any more to them of giving up their social glass of wine. I shall never be able to give any idea of my sadness, when I saw that I was to be opposed by my bishop and the whole clergy in the reform which I considered then, more and more every day, the only plank of salvation, not only of my dear people of Beauport, but of all Canada. God only knows the tears I shed, the long sleepless nights I have passed in studying, praying, meditating on that great work of Beauport. I had recourse to all the saints of heaven for more strength and light; for I was determined, at any cost, to try and form a temperance society. But every time I wanted to begin, I was frightened by the idea, not only of the wrath of the whole clergy, which would hunt me down, but still more of the ridicule of the whole country, which would overwhelm me in case of a failure. In these perplexities, I thought I would do well to write to Father Mathew and ask him his advice and the help of his prayers. That noble apostle of temperance of Ireland answered me in an eloquent letter, and pressed me to begin the work in Canada as he had done in Ireland, relying on God, without paying any attention to the opposition of man.

The wise and Christian words of that great and worthy Irish priest, came to me as the voice of God; and I determined to begin the work at once, though

the whole world should be against me. I felt that if God was in my favour, I would succeed in reforming my parish and my country in spite of all the priests and bishops of the world, and I was right. Before putting the plough into the ground, I had not only prayed to God and all His saints, almost day and night, during many months, but I had studied all the best books written in England, France and the United States, on the evils wrought by the use of intoxicating drinks. I had taken a pretty good course of anatomy in the Marine Hospital under the learned Dr. Douglas.

I was then well posted on the great subject I was to bring before my country. I knew the enemy I was to attack. And the weapons which would give him the death blow were in my hands. I only wanted my God to strengthen my hands and direct my blows. I prayed to Him, and in His great mercy He heard me.

This was on a Saturday night, March 20, 1839. The next morning was the first Sabbath of Lent. I said to the people after the sermon:

"I have told you, many times, that I sincerely believe it is my mission from God to put an end to the unspeakable miseries and crimes engendered every day, here in our whole country, by the use of intoxicating drink. Alcohol is the great enemy of your souls and your bodies. It is the most implacable enemy of your wives, your husbands, and your children. It is the most formidable enemy of our dear country and our holy religion. I must destroy that enemy. But I cannot fight alone. I must form an army and raise a banner in your midst, around which all the soldiers of the Gospel will rally. Jesus Christ Himself will be our general. He will bless and sanctify us He will lead us to victory. The next three days will be consecrated by you and by me in preparing to raise that army. Let all those who wish to fill its ranks, come and pass these three days with me in prayer and meditation before our sacred altars. Let even those who do not want to be soldiers of Christ, or to fight the great and glorious battles which are to be fought, come through curiosity, to see a most marvelous spectacle. I invite every one of you, in the name of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, whom alcohol nails anew to the cross every day. I invite you in the name of the holy Virgin Mary, and of all the saints and angels of God, who are weeping in heaven for the crimes committed every day by the use of intoxicating drinks. I invite you in the names of the wives whom I see here in your midst, weeping because they have drunken husbands. I invite you to come in the names of the fathers whose hearts are broken by drunken children. I invite you to come in the name of so many children who are starving, naked, and made desolate by their drunken parents. I invite you to come in the name of your immortal souls, which are to be eternally damned if the giant destroyer, Alcohol, be not driven from our midst."

The next morning, at eight o'clock, my church was crammed by the people. My first address was at half-past eight o'clock, the second at 10:30 a.m., the third at 2.0 p.m., and the fourth at five. The intervals between the addresses were filled by beautiful hymns selected for the occasion. Many times during my discourse the sobs and the cries of the people were such that I had to stop speaking, to mix my sobs and my tears with those of my people. That first day seventy-five men, from among the most desperate drunkards, enrolled themselves under the banner of temperance. The second day I gave

again four addresses, the effects of which were still more blessed in their result. Two hundred of my dear parishioners were enrolled in the grand army which was to fight against their implacable enemy. But it would require the hand of an angel to write the history of the third day, at the end of which, in the midst of tears, sobs, and cries of joy, three hundred more of that noble people swore, in the presence of their God, never to touch, taste, or handle the cursed drinks with which Satan inundates the earth with desolation, and fills hell with eternal cries of despair. During these three days more than two-thirds of my people had publicly taken the pledge of temperance, and had solemnly said in the presence of God, before their altars, "For the love of Jesus Christ, and by the grace of God, I promise that I will never take any intoxicating drink, except as a medicine. I also pledge myself to do all in my power, by my words and example, to persuade others to make the same sacrifice." The majority of my people, among whom we counted the most degraded drunkards, were changed and reformed, not by me, surely, but by the visible, direct work of the great and merciful God, who alone can change the heart of man.

As a great number of people from the surrounding parishes, and even from Quebec, had come to hear me the third day through curiosity, the news of that marvelous work spread very quickly throughout the whole country. The press, both French and English, were unanimous in their praises and felicitations. But when the Protestants of Quebec were blessing God for that reform, the French Canadians, at the example of their priests denounced me as a fool and heretic.

The second day of our revival I had sent messages to four of the neighbouring curates, respectfully requesting them to come and see what the Lord was doing, and help me to bless Him. But they refused. They answered my note with their contemptuous silence. One only, the Rev. Mr. Roy, curate of Charlesbourg, deigned to write me a few words, which I cope here:

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Rev. Mr. Chiniquy, Curate of Beauport.

My dear Confrere: Please forgive me if I cannot forget the respect I owe to myself, enough to go and see your fooleries.

Truly yours,

Pierre Roy.

Charlesbourg, March 5th, 1839.

The indignation of the bishop knew no bounds. A few days after, he ordered me to go to his palace and give an account of what he called my "strange conduct." When alone with me he said: "Is it possible, Mr. Chiniquy, that you have so soon forgotten my prohibition not to establish that ridiculous temperance society in your parish? Had you compromised yourself alone by that Protestant comedy for it is nothing but that I would remain silent, in my pity for you. But you have compromised our holy religion by introducing a society whose origin is clearly heretical. Last evening, the venerable Grand Vicar Demars told me that you would sooner or later become a Protestant, and

that this was your first step. Do you not see that the Protestants only praise you? Do you not blush to be praised only by heretics? Without suspecting it, you are just entering a road which leads to your ruin. You have publicly covered yourself with such ridicule that I fear your usefulness is at an end, not only in Beauport, but in all my diocese. I do not conceal it from you: my first thought, when an eye-witness told me yesterday what you had done, was to interdict you. I have been prevented from taking that step only by the hope that you will undo what you have done. I hope that you will yourself dissolve that anti-Catholic association, and promise to put an end to those novelties, which have too strong a smell of heresy to be tolerated by your bishop."

I answered: "My lord, your lordship has not forgotten that it was absolutely against my own will that I was appointed curate of Beauport; and God knows that you have only to say a word, and, without a murmur, I will give you my resignation, that you may put a better priest at the head of that people, which I consider, and which is really, today the noblest and the most sober people of Canada. But I will put a condition to the resignation of my position. It is, that I will be allowed to publish before the world that the Rev. Mr. Begin, my predecessor, has never been troubled by his bishop for having allowed his people, during twenty-three years, to swim in the mire of drunkenness; and that I have been disgraced by my bishop, and turned out from that same parish, for having been the instrument, by the mercy of God, in making them the most sober people in Canada."

The poor bishop felt, at once, that he could not stand on the ground he had taken with me. He was a few moments without knowing what to say. He saw also that his threats had no influence over me, and that I was not ready to undo what I had done. After a painful silence of a minute or two, he said: "Do you not see that the solemn promises you have extorted from those poor drunkards are rash and unwise; they will break them at the first opportunity? Their future state of degradation, after such an excitement, will be worse than the first."

I answered: "I would partake of your fears if that change were my work; but as it is the Lord's work, we have nothing to fear. The works of men are weak, and of short duration, but the works of God are solid and permanent. About the prophecy of the venerable Mr. Demars, that I have taken my first step towards Protestantism by turning a drunken into a sober people, I have only to say that if that prophecy be true, it would show that Protestantism is more apt than our holy religion to work for the glory of God and the good of the people. I hope that your lordship is not ready to accept that conclusion, and that you will not then trouble yourself with the premises. The venerable grand Vicar, with many other priests, would do better to come and see what the Lord is doing in Beauport, than to slander me and turn false prophets against its curate and people. My only answer to the remarks of your lordship, that the Protestants alone praise me, when the Roman Catholic priests and people condemn me, proves only one thing, viz., that Protestants, on this question, understand the Word of God, and have more respect for it than we Roman Catholics. It would prove also that they understand the interests of humanity better than we do, and that they have more generosity

than we have, to sacrifice their selfish propensities to the good of all. I take the liberty of saying to your lordship, that in this, as in many other things, it is high time that we should open our eyes to our false position.

"Instead of remaining at the lowest step of the ladder of one of the most Christian virtues, temperance, we must raise ourselves to the top, where Protestants are reaping so many precious fruits. Besides, would your lordship be kind enough to tell me why I am denounced and abused here, and by my fellow-priests and my bishop, for forming a temperance society in my parish, when Father Mathew, who wrote me lately to encourage and direct me in that work, is publicly praised by his bishops and blessed by the Pope for covering Ireland with temperance societies? Is your lordship ready to prove to me that Samson was a heretic in the camp of Israel when he fulfilled the promise made by his parents that he would never drink any wine, or beer; and John the Baptist, was not he a heretic and a Protestant as I am, when, to obey the voice of God, he did what I do today, with my dear people of Beauport?"

At that very moment, the sub-secretary entered to tell the bishop that a gentleman wanted to see him immediately on pressing business, and the bishop abruptly dismissed me, to my great comfort; and my impression was that he was as glad to get rid of me as I was to get rid of him.

With the exception of the Secretary, Mr. Cazeault, all the priests I met that day and the next month, either gave me the cold shoulder or overwhelmed me with their sarcasms. One of them who had friends in Beauport, was bold enough to try to go through the whole parish to turn me into ridicule by saying that I was half crazy, and the best thing the people could do was to drink moderately to my health when they went to town. But at the third house he met a woman, who, after listening to the bad advice he was giving to her husband, said to him: "I do not know if our pastor is a fool in making people sober, but I know you are a messenger of the devil, when you advise my husband to drink again. You know that he was one of the most desperate drunkards of Beauport. You personally know also what blows I have received from him when he was drunk; how poor and miserable we were; how many children had to run on the streets, half naked, and beg in order not to starve with me! Now that my husband has taken the pledge of temperance, we have every comfort; my dear children are well fed and clothed, and I find myself as in a little paradise. If you do not go out of this house at once, I will turn you out with my broomstick." And she would have fulfilled her promise, had not the priest had the good sense to disappear at the "double quick."

The next four months after the foundation of the society in Beauport, my position when with the other priests was very painful and humiliating. I consequently avoided their company as much as possible. And, as for my bishop, I took the resolution never to go and see him, except he should order me into his presence. But my merciful God indemnified me by the unspeakable joy I had in seeing the marvelous change wrought by Him among my dear people. Their fidelity in keeping the pledge was really wonderful, and soon became the object of admiration of the whole city of Quebec, and of the surrounding country. The change was sudden, so complete and so permanent, that the scoffing bishop and priests, with their friends, had, at last, to blush and be silent.



The public aspect of the parish was soon changed, the houses were repaired, the debts paid, the children well clad. But what spoke most eloquently about the marvelous reform was that the seven thriving saloons of Beauport were soon closed, and their owners forced to take other occupations. Peace, happiness, abundance, and industry, everywhere took the place of the riots, fighting, blasphemies and the squalid misery which prevailed before. The gratitude and respect of that noble people for their young curate knew no bounds; as my love and admiration for them cannot be told by human words.

However, though the great majority of that good people had taken the pledge, and kept it honourably, there was a small minority, composed of the few who never had been drunkards, who had not yet enrolled themselves under our blessed banners. Though they were glad of the reform, it was very difficult to persuade them to give up their social glass! I thought it was my duty to show them in a tangible way, what I had so often proved with my words only, that the drinking of the social glass of wine, or of beer, is an act of folly, if not a crime. I asked my kind and learned friend, Dr. Douglas, to analyze, before the people, the very wine and beer used by them, to show that it was nothing else but a disgusting and deadly poison. He granted my favour. During four days that noble philanthropist extracted the alcohol, which is not only in the most common, but in the most costly and renowned wines, beer, brandy and whisky. He gave that alcohol to several cats and dogs, which died in a few minutes in the presence of the whole people.

These learned and most interesting experiments, coupled with his eloquent and scientific remarks, made a most profound impression. It was the corner-stone of the holy edifice which our merciful God built with His own hands in Beauport. The few recalcitrants joined with the rest of their dear friends.