

Chapter XVII

Rev. John Brady

Chaplain 15th Michigan Vol.

At the request of a deputation from the Regiment he becomes their Chaplain - His services in the field night and day - a war of words - His services in Vicksburg and Chattanooga - After the battle of Nashville his Regiment proceeds to North Carolina - His Regiment disbanded at the close of the war - Father Brady's death from disease contracted in the service.

This good and zealous priest was a native of Ireland, which country he never ceased to love with all the yearning of a true patriot. He came to America in charge of a colony of Sisters of the Order of St. Bridget, and was assigned to a mission at Grand Rapids, State of Michigan. Here, for several years previous to the breaking out of the rebellion, he labored faithfully, attending to the spiritual wants of his flock, and, by his piety and zeal, greatly tended to the advancement of Catholicity. The Fifteenth Michigan was mainly an Irish and a Catholic regiment, and was among the foremost to respond to the national call for troops. A deputation from the regiment waited on Father Brady, requesting him to become their chaplain. He at once consented, provided the Bishop of the Diocese gave his consent. This was soon obtained, and the patriotic priest at once prepared to encounter the numerous fatigues, dangers and perils inseparable from the life of a Catholic chaplain in the field, in order to minister to the spiritual wants of his fellow Christians and countrymen. It was the soldier of the Cross, following the example of his Divine Master, volunteering to embrace all kinds of hardships and perils, in order to alleviate the sufferings and pangs of the victims of the sword.

His first services in the field with his regiment was in Kentucky, where he labored night and day, both in the camp and in the hospitals, hearing confessions, nursing and consoling the sick and wounded, and cheering the last moments of the departing, with the rites of his holy Church and the promise of a glorious resurrection. In the hospitals and on the field, he acted the good Samaritan, and freely rendered assistance to all alike, regardless of religion or politics. From Kentucky, he removed with his regiment into Tennessee. At Memphis he met with considerable annoyance, even from members of his own Church, whose devotion to the Confederate cause blinded them to the Christian duties of a Catholic chaplain. These extremists assailed him as a Yankee priest and a supporter of the Yankee invasion. The good Father bore all this with humility, and, by his acts and example, soon convinced them that he was the soldier of Christ, not of any earthly power. The regiment was next ordered to Vicksburg, and was accompanied by its devoted chaplain. Among the many camp incidents that varied the lives of chaplains, the following occurred to him:

An Irishman and a German, both wounded, occupied contiguous beds, near the door of the hospital. Father Brady, on entering, used the Christian salutation of "God bless you all!" "Amen, and you, too!" said the Irishman. "Vat you mean?" asked the German. "I be in von hell now mid these pains, and me vants no other hell, mine wound is as much hell as I vant. I bees no d-d Christian."

"Faith, in troth, you're a nice chap!" said the Irishman. "I'm thinking the d— I has a lease of you, anyway; but, troth, you must be a Jew. Arnt you, Dutchman?"

"So I bees, and ish as good as you."

"Viz, faith, but you never heard me grunting as you do, like an old woman with a toothache."

"Yoh, yoh! a tamp nice place mine tooth be, in mine back."

"Och, your back," said the other, with contempt, "did you ever know a good sodger to get shot in the back?"

"Och, mine broder bees one fool!" exclaimed the other; at which there was a roar of laughter from the other beds.

Father Brady took advantage of this diversion to give some seasonable advice, which had its effect, not only upon the wordy combatants, but also upon the other patients.

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After rendering good service at Vicksburg, and contributing towards its surrender, the Fifteenth Michigan was dispatched, by General Grant, to reinforce the Army of the Cumberland under General Rosecrans. The regiment participated in that arduous march across the States of Alabama, Mississippi, and part of Tennessee, which General Logan's command, and others, had undertaken, in order to hurry to the support of Rosecrans, who was hard-pressed at Chattanooga. On arriving at Huntsville, in Northern Alabama, General Logan received orders, in obedience to which the command rested for some time. As the Catholic inhabitants of the place had not the services of a priest for some time, for Father Tracy, the pastor, and missionary priest of Northern Alabama, was serving in Chattanooga as chaplain to General Rosecrans, Father Brady extended his ministrations to the Catholic inhabitants. His offer was coldly received, particularly by the ladies, who seemed far bitter against the Northerners than the men in the field. Father Brady met this bitter hostility with mildness and firmness. To an Irish lady, who showed her ignorance by refusing to shake hands with a Yankee chaplain, he simply said—"My dear lady, it is not the duty of the chaplain, the minister of Christ, to take part with either side in this unnatural conflict. Our duty is to shrive the penitent and dying, to attend to the sick and wounded, and try and alleviate their sufferings—no matter whether they are Federals or Confederates." She commenced a virulent abuse of the Yanks, but was stopped by the chaplain, who simply replied:—"Madame, I do not want to argue politics with you; to me it is not a pleasant subject, and it ought to be much less so to a lady, if she has the feelings and instincts of a lady. Pray tell me, have ye a church here?" "No, sir, Father Tracy commenced one here, but gave it up when the war broke out, and is now chaplain to the Yankees." "Where, then, did Father Tracy celebrate Mass when he was here?" "In the upper part of the Callahan building, which he had temporarily fitted up as a church." Madame was a very bitter rebel, and did not attend Mass, because celebrated by a Northern priest—thus showing her Christian humility and obedience.

The regiment, accompanied by its chaplain, marched for Chattanooga, where a new and extensive field awaited him, though the Rev. Fathers Tracy, Cooney, Christie, O'Higgins and Fousette, were located in and around the town, with their commands, and rendering all the aid in their power. The hospitals were full of sufferers after the battle of Chickamauga and the engagements around Chattanooga. So that the chaplains found unceasing labors, night and day, in ministering to the spiritual and temporal wants of the inmates. Here rather an amusing incident occurred. Father Brady, on entering the hospital one morning, gave his usual salutation of—"God bless all here!" "If he does," said one of the men, "I rather guess you'll come in for a fair share; for I never saw a preacher who had not the best furnished table, and come in for more than his share of all the good things." "Shut up!" cried out a sergeant of Minty's Regular Brigade; "shure, he is a priest, and no preacher." This doubtful compliment reminds us of the officer, who, being addressed as Mr. soldier, haughtily replied—"Sir, I am an officer." "Oh, I beg pardon, Mr. officer and no soldier," replied the other. Father Brady, without heeding the remark, quietly sat beside the cynical invalid, and meekly asked him—"Where are you wounded, my friend?" "Under the arm, sir," replied the other; "I got a bullet-hole there, but it's nothing worth talking of." The Father entered into conversation with him, and soon learned that he belonged to no religious denomination, and had never been baptized. "Be gad!" exclaimed the sergeant, who had quietly listened to the conversation, "he is a pagant; d—l a bit of the grace of God about him. Lord deliver us!" The ardent sergeant was silenced by the priest; but occasionally he showed his contempt for the other's ignorance on religious matters, by a shake of the head and a wink to his companions. Father Brady talked for some time with the other on religious subjects; and so great an impression had his solemn advice and warning upon him and others, that, after a few days, they asked to be received into his Church, to the no small delight of the Pennsylvania sergeant, who took upon himself the full credit of having discovered "the pagant." This is only one of the many instances of the good effected by this pious priest in the hospitals of Chattanooga; and many a man, living to-day, can date his awakening to the truths of religion, from his impressive discourses and Christian ministrations.

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The Fifteenth Michigan followed the fortunes of General Sherman in his grand campaign through the Southern States. Father Brady had been detailed to attend hospital duty in Chattanooga, and, therefore, did not participate in the Atlanta campaign. He again joined the regiment in front of Atlanta, but was again sent back to attend the hospitals in Chattanooga, which affected him sorely, as he had a kind of paternal affection for his own boys, as he called the men of the Fifteenth Michigan.

General Sherman had now cut loose for the sea, and General Thomas had fallen back through Alabama to counteract the movements of General Hood upon Nashville. As General Hood, in his movements, threatened Chattanooga, a considerable force was concentrated there under command of the lamented General Thomas F. Meagher. Between Father Brady's attendance at the hospitals and his ministrations to the troops, he had a busy time of it in Chattanooga; indeed, so overpowering and la-

borious were his duties, night and day, that his health gave way, and he began to break down rapidly.

After the battle of Nashville, and discomfiture of General Hood's army, Father Brady accompanied the troops detached to Wilmington, North Carolina, to co-operate with Sherman. He rejoined his regiment at Raleigh; and the men were overjoyed to see their faithful chaplain once more. He marched with them from North Carolina to Washington, and had the satisfaction of seeing the gallant remnant of his old Celtic regiment proudly march in review before the President of the nation. The regiment, having fulfilled its mission and earned for itself a high reputation, returned home, and was disbanded in the City of Detroit, Michigan.

Though the good Father's health had been failing for some time, the excitement of active, hard duties, and the pleasure of being again united with his favorite regiment, had sustained him. The reaction soon proved fatal; for, in three days after the disbandment of the men, he sickened, and was removed to the Sister's hospital, where he died in eight days afterwards.

Thus had the good priest fought the good fight, and worked untiringly in the vineyard of God, who now rewards, with a crown of everlasting glory, *His good and faithful servant!*