CHAPTER III

CLASHING ARMS AND WARRING RAPIDS

FOR the next twenty-two years of the Irish lad's life the data we have are scanty, nebulous and contradictory: we shall state the most plausible. Three things stand out as prominent and sure: His dream of Niagara Falls became, possibly, less frequent, but none the less persistent; the persistency of the dream to return and plague him was accentuated by the fact that he read literature different from the "Seven Wonders of the World," but none the less alluring; and he saw, heard, and, no doubt, interviewed Bishop Rosati, and Fathers Odin and Timon on their tours through Europe in the interest of their Congregation.

The little Irish dreamer was a "broth of a boy" eighteen years of age when Father Odin carried the Decrees of the Council of Baltimore to Rome for approval. It was the first time in twelve years that the Frenchman saw his native heath and we naturally find no undue enthusiasm in wishing to leave it prematurely, or, at least, in wishing to place an ocean between it and himself. For two years he toured Europe, seeking recruits for the American missions. His highest hopes lay in Ireland, the nursery of faith for the English speaking world; and Maynooth was the cradle.

We have no doubt that it was here at Maynooth Johnnie Lynch saw the Frenchman from the American forests standing before an audience of Irish seminarians. To the boy this priest would be a man of mystery, a figure of a romance made real, as though the hero of a novel would leap from the printed page, and, bowing to a reader, should say, "Well, here I am!" The boy was actually looking at a man from the land of Niagara Falls! The boy would resolve that when he should have been ordained, and had gone to America, and

had come back like this Father Odin, he would tell his audience about the heights of the Falls and the depths of Devil's Hole; and then all the students would start a cross-country run for Queenstown docks. But this priest spoke of hardships, and scattered Catholics and few priests; said that when his superior had gone to St. Louis there were ten thousand Catholics in the city, but no resident priest: two priests were across the river, and one of them was over seventy years of age, and the other was too weak to ride a horse. Things like that. Why didn't he tell them about the Indians, and scalps and Fort Niagara?—We think that it was at this time the boy resolved to cast his lot with the Vincentians—and see Niagara. We do not doubt that his prime intention was to serve God and win souls; but we think that this intention did not exclude the intention of seeing the Falls. Perhaps he thought that, once at the Barrens which this priest talked about, he would jump on a horse some day after breakfast, and be back in time for dinner: no one would know where he had been. In the meantime, he would study up every scrap of news about the wonderful place and about the whole country of his future adoption.

News came slow, of course, in these pre-cable days; but when it came it was all the more lurid because of the inability quickly to check its truth. The Irish newspapers still spoke of the tragedy of 1826 when William Morgan, the Mason, was said to have repudiated his order, and had published his book entitled "Illustrations of Masonry." They had graphic accounts of the Sovereign Tribunal decreeing his death, and of commanding Loton Lawson and other Royal Arch Masons of Batavia, to execute it. All the details of the torturing and the murdering were displayed and *seemingly* authenticated; the murderers were brought to trial but received very light sentences; and, in protest at this miscarriage of justice, three hundred Masons three years afterwards, on July 4th, publicly declared that Morgan's revelations were true, and renounced their allegiance. But the thing that would enthrall

the Irish boy was this: the executioners *were said* to have tortured and imprisoned Morgan in the magazine of Fort Niagara, before they hurled him over the cliff, a hundred feet into the water. Tourists were now going to visit that Fort and to shiver gloriously, just as they had gone to Lundy's Lane to see the spot where the "Spy" had fallen. Busses now ran every hour from the Falls to Devil's Hole: you could walk the rest of the way—or take a cab. To the Irish dreamer the Fort became a thing as delightfully gruesome as the Devil's Hole; but his wildest dreams never pictured that one day his seminary would rise near that Fort. A quarter of a century afterwards he often stood upon the brink of the precipice that fronted his estate, looked north to where the dark Fort loomed, and wondered at the mystery still unsolved, and the persistency of lurid rumors.

And no doubt, too, in those years at Maynooth he often read how the Falls had begun to attract the modern fanatics, the crazed and the superstitious, the forsaken lover and the forsaken outcast, the dare-devil and the "blue" devil, and the hundreds of sensation mongers; just as formerly it had attracted the artist, the poet and the philosopher. For a century and a half three nations had battled with one another for the control of the region, impelled thereunto not by the beauty of a cataract but by the bounty on a pelt. Merchants of Paris, London, and later, New York City paid well for the fur of a mink or the hide of a bear. In 1656, August, five hundred canoes laden with pelts reached Quebec. And about the same time did not Holland sell to Peter Schuyler and four others all the land between Fonda and Utica for five beaver skins? But before My Lady of Paris had her delicate shoulders draped with pelt of the bear, it had draped the shoulders of an Indian who, bent in two with it and many others, had trudged along Portage Road the ten miles from La Salle to Fort Niagara for shipment across the seas. She might pay five thousand francs for her coat; but the Indian carrying for ten miles five thousand dollars' worth of future coats was paid

sixteen cents. Oh, it was a profitable business, this fur trade. And the route from Georgian Bay to London and Paris lay over Portage Road.

But that era had gone, and was succeeded by the era of the stage coach and canal boat with their poets, philosophers and painters; and the railroads soon followed with sensation mongers. Formerly nations had fought for the skin of a beaver; now individuals would fight for the applause of a multitude, and the sad of heart would come to fight for solace of soul, or surcease of sorrow, or even the salvation of the world. It was of these that now John Lynch would read.

In the year preceding Morgan's disappearance Mardochai Noah, the sad-eyed seer, lays on Goat Island the corner stone of his temple that will be the Capitol of the New Jerusalem; and three years after Morgan's fatal plunge into the river, the fiery-eyed Sam Patch shows right below the Falls how the leap can be made without fatality, but not without the hope of silvery dollars rewarding the mountebank's daring. At the Cave of the Winds he builds a wooden tower capped with a platform ninety-seven feet above the sombre eddies, and twice leaps into the flood. And in that same year comes the mysterious Abbott, the Hermit of the Falls, and builds his hut near the abandoned corner stone of the New Jerusalem. On summer nights the multitudes would gather on Prospect Point in the moonlight, and with faces turned towards the Island would, still as death, await the mournful music. The moon would swing her arch across the cataract's brow, like a golden spirit of a goddess with her fingers to her lips bidding adieu. The Hermit, silent as the night, would stroll from the shadows of his cabin into the gleam by the water's edge. His face shone paler than the moonlit spray. Sad, plaintive notes from his violin spoke of some great sorrow. A few of the more curious who had gone over to the Island and had hidden themselves behind the trees said that to the violin he was confessing some dreadful, sinful secrets of his heart, and that he would pause, bow his head and listen to the musical words of

absolution throbbing from the soul of the instrument; and if they rustled but a leaf, he would rise and sigh, press his consoler to his bosom, and shamble back into his cabin: no ears profane might listen to his tale.

When he was routed from his Island home, he built himself another hut across the river near where now is the "Hennepin" tablet, still on the American side. He was sandwiched in between the bluff and a beer garden. He could have found solitude in a hundred spots on the Canadian bank, but rumor had it that he feared English justice: a minion of Scotland Yard might be waiting his appearance. And so on the American side he daily at sunrise descended the cliff to a spot about where now the "Maid of the Mist" embarks with her tourists, and bathed, till one morn an eddy swung him from the shore and shot him a mile down the river to death. His body was recovered at Fort Niagara.

Mysterious was this man, silent, gentle, cheerful even. Whenever he did happen to speak he spoke with an eloquence learned only from wide reading, deep thinking and keen sympathy. Some said that he was the son of an Episcopalian clergyman of England; that by some great crime he had disgraced his family, broken his mother's heart and shattered his own life beyond repair. Others said that he was the son of an English Catholic mother and an Italian father; that after the mother's death his father had taught him to hate the church and to love the Mafia; that the last had initiated him into its secrets, and had commissioned him to leave England, and on a certain day in Rome when a Papal procession would be winding its way into St. Peters, to assassinate the Pope; that on the appointed day when the Pope was standing on a balcony of the Vatican he had fired and missed; that then he had fled to this country, had gone to the sacraments with a repentant heart, and was spending the rest of his days in expiation of his guilt. But whatever was his history, there can be no doubt of his unbalanced mind. No man of sanity would place a long plank out from the corner of Goat Island to a

point in front of the Cataract, pace to and fro above the dizzy height, and then from it hang by his toes, fold his arms and gaze into the misted sheet of thunder.

Such news in the Irish press would, no doubt, enthrall the young student of Maynooth. Not so enthralling would be the new book, then quite popular, that was written by the English Episcopalian minister, the Rev. Isaac Fidler, describing his impressions of the United States. The student could, indeed, appreciate the clergyman's remark that in all his travels through the States he had seen but one drunken man—an Englishman likewise traveling. He could appreciate the writer's indictment of the youth of the new country—excessively independent and impertinent. He could understand the traveler's condemnation of the schools of the land, even though he might not agree with it. Perhaps it was true that in Montreal and Quebec "sound education is carried to a greater extent than in any other place in the new world." Maybe, too, it was true that even the swine of the cities showed their independence; that hogs walked the sidewalks of New York as freely as dogs. But what was this "Tammany" about which he waxed wroth? Some kind of a hall, "where the lower and more restless orders went to dispute political and religious questions?" And why did the writer think that popery and democracy were the curses of modern civilization, and grieve to realize the truth of Bishop Du Bois' statement that there were more than thirty thousand Catholics around New York City? Did not the writer admit that his church would yet save the nation by its union of church and state? Perhaps, too, he read the English reviews of Samuel Morse's book on "Popery," written nine years before he had laid the first telegraph line between Washington and Baltimore—a book that showed how the great scientist could invent other things than electric dots and dashes.

More soothing would be the reading before his novitiate days of the wonderful exploits of the steam engine, the "DeWitt Clinton" which had made her maiden trip from New

York City to Albany, despite the fact that it was only six years previously when such mechanical contrivances were labeled by an Ohio school board as impossibilities and rank infidelities: "There is nothing in the Word of God about them. If God designed that His intelligent creatures should travel at the frightful rate of speed of fifteen miles an hour by steam, He would have foretold it by His holy prophets. It is a device of Satan to lead immortal souls to hell." No doubt, the student could find solace in tracing on a map a journey from the metropolis to his Falls: all the way by railroad to Albany—even to Schenectady; then by stage to Lockport, and over the corduroy roads to Lewiston and the Falls.

But he would not find in the newspapers what only the topers in the tavern atop the Gorge could have told him. Because of the new mode of travel, business was picking up. Wooden rails stretched now all the way from Lockport to what we call "Suspension Bridge." The newly constructed "speed line" ran right in the rear of the tavern—through its back yard. The cars looked like stagecoaches on rails. They seated some sixteen, some even twenty-four passengers. Curtains draped the sides, something in the manner of our modern summer trolleys. And the motor was the horse, not always a self-starter, but frequently a self-stopper. The ravine that now runs south and west of our graveyard then continued at almost right angles eastward, past the site of the present Seminarians' gymnasium to the present site of the College Lake. A bridge spanned the ravine for the passage of the cars. And when the "perilous" crossing had been made, all hands, of course, had to get out and congratulate the driver, and drink his health over the bar. They were the days when in distant places steam roads were just beginning to agitate the souls of men.

Just about the year that we judge John Lynch was finishing his novitiate in the Vincentian Seminary in Paris (1837, we judge), the horse cars were about finishing their existence near his future home. Real, live, honest-to-goodness steam

engines were pulling the stage-coach speedsters over the old horse-car rails at the dizzy speed of fifteen miles an hour. Brave was the man of Lockport who would a-mornings shake hands in farewell to his friends, and with the assumed carelessness that spoke a soul ready for any fate, would declare he was off on the steam cars to Niagara Falls. Friends, cheering, would make him forget his danger. Who knows—he might come home in the evening alive? If so he would regale his listeners with the wonders of the "Snorting Rocket," and assure them it was not half so dangerous as it looked: "It never blowed up once!" Then came the iron rails, and the prediction of the mechanical engineers that in a few years they would be shooting by that tavern at thirty miles an hour. Of course, no one believed them: they were but men drunk with their own success. Let them rave on! Why, anyone could see that even though you persuaded the wheels to turn that fast, they could not grasp the rails: simply spin around in the same place. And, anyway, who would want to pass a tavern that fast? They ought to build a station there.

However, before all these things had come to pass, the Parisian novice had learned that shortly before he had left Ireland the Eighth General Assembly (1835) had been held in the Mother House, and in that Assembly a young American priest, one of the first natives raised to the priesthood, had been appointed the first Provincial of the Vincentians in the new world. Thereafter, they would be not a section of the province of Rome, but an integral unit of the Order. The new Provincial, only ten years ordained, was called Father Timon. When the little American came again to Paris in September 1837, to tour Europe for men and money to run his new venture, the little Irishman saw that the American was smaller even than himself—in stature; but bigger far in enthusiasm and mentality and stability. We think that it must have been at this time that John Lynch asked him for the first time about Niagara. The Provincial never had seen the place! Strange, how a man could have lived so long near so wonder-

ful a work of nature, and not take the trouble to view it! And what an astounding country must that be where such a stupendous thing could be spoken of so casually! But still, withal, Father Timon to the seminarian must have been the embodiment of romance more alluring than had been even Father Odin. Of course, the seminarian would go to the States just as soon as permission could be obtained. But the American thought, evidently, that it would be advisable for the young enthusiast to await ordination first.

In the interim, the Irishman would read all the stirring history of the region around the Falls. He knew that Hennepin exaggerated when he said that the Falls was six hundred feet high; and La Hontan, eight hundred. "When I see it first, it may look eight thousand!" But particularly interesting to him would be the missionaries' accounts of their success with the Indians. We know that the volumes of the "Jesuit Relations" of the early American days became his constant and self-constituted spiritual reading. Everything he read was grist for his mill, and his mill was run by the dreams of falling waters.

The history naturally divided itself into two epochs: the hundred and thirty-three years of French occupation, ending in 1759, and the ensuing thirty-seven years of British occupation. The hundred and thirty-three years would be subdivided into the "Sway of the Cross Without the Sword," and the "Sway of the Cross With the Sword:" fifty-three years of a swordless sway, ending in 1679, followed by eighty years with the sword.

The swordless sway began in 1626 when the lowly Franciscan Joseph D'Allion, six years after the Pilgrims had landed on Plymouth Rock, came with two traders from Georgian Bay. Never had there been Mass said in the region. More than a century before the coming of the Pilgrim Fathers, Mass began in Florida with the advent of Ponce de Leon. More than eighty years before their coming, Mass began on the shores of the St. Lawrence with the coming of Cartier. For

the century and more before their coming the only public act of adoration to Jesus Christ was the Mass. And now, six years after their coming to the coasts of Massachusetts, the Mass would be said five hundred miles west along the forest-clad lakes. True, the humble priest kept no diary that he would afterwards publish to the world. The Redman's present soul meant more to him than the future white man's praise. But the only reason of his coming was to explain the Mass. He says nothing of having seen the Falls. He stayed in the region some months, though deserted by the two traders who uneasy grew when the Hurons trailed him to tell the Neuters of the locality that he was a magician, ate lightning and thunder, and could destroy their whole nation. He left the next year, evidently discouraged.

Thirteen years after him, along the same trail, came the Jesuits Brebeuf and Chaumonot; and their stay was as short as the Franciscan's. The Hurons tracked them, also, and plied the same tales into the twelve thousand Neuters: "These Black Robes are Magicians! They will disease your cattle, dry up the clouds, wither your crops, shrivel your children and poison your springs!" When the priests understood that they could not get their doctrine of the Mass into the hearts of the Neuters, but could very easily get themselves into their stomachs—that the Indians were actually preparing to eat them alive, they naturally manifested no particular enthusiasm for this peculiar kind of Mardi Gras. In fact, at the risk of injuring the feelings of their hosts, they voiced to a few secret informants their hearty disapproval of the whole project, and tried to convince them that, indeed, such a thing was not being done in the best society; that it was thoroughly unsocial, eminently unhygienic, and calculated to lead to internal disorders and gastronomic entanglements: they absolutely refused to vote for it. They thanked their informants, but threatened to show their displeasure by declining, if possible, to grace the occasion with their presence. Arguments were useless. So a few hours before the

festival began, with the help of a friendly squaw they spoiled the party by slipping away under cover of darkness: these savages should be taught some manners. Yes, they slipped away, but went right back to the Hurons. These latter might at times be cannibalistic; but ordinarily, even in their wildest orgies, they preferred their human roast "well done." Ten years later the Huron missions ended in discouragement; but the intrepid priests, Chaumonot and Dablon, passing by the Neuters as hopeless, went to the Iroquois around Onondaga, New York, though only nine years previously the Iroquois at Auriesville had tortured slowly to death the sainted Jogues and his companions; and when the newcomers had learned after a few months' stay in that region that they were destined for the stake, they left for Montreal. However, the following year another Jesuit, Ragueneau, entered the region of Onondaga, and in letters to his confreres spoke of the "cataract falling from a dreadful height," and in his sermons to his Redskins spoke of the God that had made the Cataract and the moon and the stars, and of His Son that men had hung upon a cross. But when the Redskins spoke of another man that would soon hang upon a stake over a slow fire, he escaped after seven months of fruitless effort, and made his way back to Montreal. And eleven years later still, the Sulpicians, De Galinee and De Casson, pass on their way from Montreal to the west—but they keep going. Thus ended the Swordless Sway, not in utter failure, but in patient waiting for the blood of martyrs to enrich the soil it had drenched.

Then came the eighty years' Sway of the French Sword. It began nine years after the passage of the Sulpicians, and ended in 1759. The sword was not always brandishing, but it was always rattling. Richelieu was dead now thirty-six years, but his dream of fortifying the Lakes to the Mississippi Valley, and of fortifying the Valley to the Gulf of Mexico (thus hemming in the English and the Dutch to the Atlantic seaboard) had not departed from the brains of the statesmen, the cavaliers and the merchants of France. La Salle was given the