

CHAPTER V

MULUM VIRUMQUE CANO

“**O**F a mule and a man I sing!” The Bard of Mantua sang of “arms:” we sing of legs—hind legs. Of course, the caption of our chapter makes a line not so smooth as Virgil’s, nor is the first “foot” what we should wish. No; but what can you expect when it happens to be the foot of a mule? It is always doing the thing unexpected. And why should we look for smoothness in art where nature has placed but roughness? What cares a mule for “spondees” or “dactyls” if he by a blow can make you turn up your toes to the stars and the daisies? Art may prefer for the opening of its line “one long and two shorts;” but a mule always opens up with two “longs,” regardless of what may follow. The Latins of Virgil’s day may have been interested in hexameter “heroics;” but the Texans of Father Lynch’s day were more interested in tetrameter hoofs.

With characteristic energy the priest threw himself into his work. He must try to master the red Indian guttural, the olive-tinted Spanish patois, the cowboy’s tanned jargon; and, most important of all, the mule’s dark-brown antics. The gutturals and patois were to him dull and troublesome; the jargon that the American cowboy called English was really interesting; but the sign language of the mule was positively entrancing. Get a Texas mule on one end of a rope, and an Irishman on the other, and you have a spectacle more thrilling than our modern wrestling matches or prize fights, because the size of the mat is the area of a corral, and the size of the ring has not even the boundaries of a county. Besides, the mule scorns the use of gloves, and specializes in “haymaker” uppercuts whose radius seemingly extends from the juniper plant to the Jupiter planet;

and neither he nor the Irishman knows when he is "licked."

So far as we have read history, we think that Father Lynch was the first priest that used the mule for advertising the pulpit. He had a discouraging time in trying to have the cowboys attend morning or evening services where Catholic doctrine would be explained. But the mule showed how it might be done: just stage an exhibition in public. If the priest won the contest, he won also the cowboys. Still, withal, the mule seemed ever more anxious for the exhibition than did the priest; and without the slightest warning, on the most embarrassing thoroughfares would remember that it pays to advertise. They might both be ambling along a village street, the best of friends, content with life, "brightest and best of the sons of the morning," when suddenly the mule would put down his head and up his heels; then the four hoofs would hug, and the spine would hunch, and immediately stretch out for a mad dash down Main Street. All this would be exhilarating for the rider till at the village hotel, where, on the veranda, like the Athenians of old the rustic philosophers gathered, waiting for something new to turn up, the mule would instantaneously apply four brakes, tail heavenward and nose in adoration laid upon the dust. The priest would glide smoothly over the ears, while the mule would cavort in happy circles around his victim; yes, in circles: the priest would still have hold of the bridle. It would be the end of "Round One!" and the beginning of encouraging laughs from the porch. But neither man nor mule would go into a neutral corner. Cheers and jeers would accompany the gladiators circling for an opening. Sundry suggestions from the spectators: "Put salt on his tail!" "Tickle his left hoof with a feather!" "Hey, Preacher, whisper in his ear how much you love him!" Maybe in such moments the priest had a dull painful memory of the massacre of the "Devil's Hole:" if he got in the rear of that mule he might land like the drummer boy in that dim, dark well, fifteen hundred miles away. Or possibly, he may have imagined himself an Indian, and that mule the

English army! He must conquer it! And he always did—amid the plaudits of the multitude. And away they would jog on the best of terms, friends for life—till the demon from the "Devil's Hole" would again whisper into the mule's inner consciousness the strains of "The Battle of the Boyne."

One day, after such an encounter, a cowboy came up to shake the "preacher's" hand. Between profane congratulations and profuse expectorations he said: "I wuz jus' awaitin' t' see how you'd rustle that ther mule! Hell! Any preacher what kin do that preaches the right stuff fer me! I'm comin' up t' hear y'! 'll bring up all the boys!" And he did; and eventually he followed the Catholic priest into the Catholic "corral." We have often wondered how many of the "boys" hit the same trail?

In the course of time, it seems that the mule must have become truly contrite and repentant of his past misdeeds; not that conscience really made a coward of him, but maybe only a convict—one that respected at least the uniform of his guard: he certainly did become servilely respectful of the clerical dress, provided it remained truly clerical. True, he seemed to respect more the dress than the person: his mule psychology taught him, despite all ascetical writers to the contrary, that it is the garb that makes the monk. But you cannot expect too much of a mule, at least of a Texas mule, especially when novel and unexpected temptations arouse primordial emotions that befog his judgment before his will has a Chinaman's chance to function. We have delved deep into a mule's catalysis; we have applied all our modern tests of cellular reactions and motivations; have noted the instinctive intrusiveness of atavistic tendencies and Nordic inspirational inheritances; have duly noticed the unexpected orientations of his cosmic urge towards anthropomorphic behaviorism; and we have kept before our minds all the while the question "Why mules behave like human beings;" and we have come to the conclusion that it is with many mules as with many men: they will respect appearances more than realities,

the gown of a judge more than his authority, the flag of a country more than its welfare, and the collar of a priest more than his person. This can be the only explanation of the following incident:

The Irish priest and the Texas mule seemed to have become mutually respectful. They lived together, shared most things in common, and each imbibed somewhat the qualities of the other. The mule became more gentle, the priest more persistent. They lived both in the open, on the steppes of the mountain, under the cactus of the prairie or the pines by the river. So used to life in the open became the priest that he, no more than the mule, could sleep on a mattress in a room. They both found their food where they could; and when they lay down at nights near the burning faggots they listened with equal contempt to the screech of the owl, the bark of the coyote, the growl of the bear or the whine of the wild-cat. Too bad we have no record of the confidences at these times exchanged between man and mule. But we feel sure that the priest must often have spoken to his lone companion of his home in Ireland that he might never see again, and of Niagara Falls that he was going to see some day.

Well, one time, about 1845, in the spring, he found himself even so far afield as the Colorado river, at a point where he judged he could swim his mule across. The torrent swung them down the torrent. Did he think then what must have been the sentiments of the Maid of the Mist in her canoe? Anyhow, as they wheeled around boulders, and water washed over man and beast, both banks seemed made of mist, disappearing into distances. The waves washed him off the beast's back, but he held on to the bridle. Both fought for their lives, but the mule's instinct knew more about torrents than did the priest's reason, and guided them to where both could gain a foothold. When they had emerged, he tied the mule to a juniper tree to dry while grazing, took off the saddle bags, and searched first for his breviary. He had done well to pack it in that tin box wrapped tight around with clothing:

the book was as dry as toast. He could not well go into the next village, looking like a drowned rat; so, some distance from the mule, he found a place where he could take off his garments and hang them in the sun. While they dried, he would say his office. When he had finished his prayers he went to inspect his clothing. The mule not recognizing the traveler in Eden's garb, gazed for a moment steadily in astonishment, snorted, tugged his bridle loose and ran like greased lightning in the direction of home. Neither all the threats of death, nor all the honied words of blandishment could stay that steed. There was nothing else to do but for the man to cache his goods in the forest, find the trail to the nearest village and with another mule hired for the occasion bring home his belongings. We know not exactly how many days afterwards it was when he reached home; but when he did and the mule saw him, the latter stopped his oats-munching for a moment, arched his browless eyebrows and gave a series of snorts. The priest was not sure of his interpretation, but he thought the snorts were inquisitive: "Did you, also, see that funny white animal out there by the Colorado? Isn't it too bad your powder was wet!"

But two other things happened to turn the current of the priest's life. On March 6th, 1842, Father Odin was consecrated Bishop of Texas. He would not accept till his Provincial had brought all pressure possible to urge him thereto: To be Bishop there would be more a martyrdom than an honor. It would not be deserting the Community, but stabilizing it. The church needed one that understood conditions of the country there, and of the country to the north. From the way things were shaping it looked like war with Mexico, perhaps, because there was so much talk of Texas seeking admission into the United States. If that war came, then it were best that the bishop of the place be neither Mexican nor American. Timon was an American. If he should take it, the Mexicans would say that he was partial to the States. If a Mexican bishop took it, the States would say that he did not

understand American conditions, and could not be fair even though he did understand them. But here was Odin, a Frenchman, who would be as an umpire between the two parties without the danger of partiality; and from his life there he certainly understood conditions, etc., etc.

We doubt very much that at this time Father Odin understood that Father Timon had himself written to the Pope, urging him to appoint for the place Father Odin. We do not know, of course, but we strongly suspect that there were other motives than those mentioned above: it would save the young priest from the dangers of being honored with Detroit where the Community would be likely to lose his services; and it would save Father Timon from the dangers of being honored in Texas. We feel that when urging Father Odin to take Texas his argument would be, "Texas is not an honor but a martyrdom." In saving himself from Texas the argument would be, "While Texas is a martyrdom, it is an honor, too; and I am not made for honors." He would be perfectly sincere in his method of reasoning, especially with his best friend, and was perfectly convinced that he himself had not the qualities fitted for a bishop. Archbishop Hughes afterwards said of him, "He is the humblest man I ever met."

The second thing that turned the current of Father Lynch's life was the war. The United States had for some time been telling the Texans that "We know that you wish to be one with us, now don't you?" And the Mexicans had been telling the Texans, "You wish nothing of the kind; and if you dare to become engaged to your Uncle Sam, we'll spank you, and thrash your Uncle." But in 1845 Texas threw herself into her Uncle's arms, and in the next year Mexico began her spanking and thrashing. In the spring of 1846 some armed Mexicans crossed the Rio Grande and killed a number of Americans. At the end of two years' fighting Uncle Sam said to Mexico, "You've been a very bad boy! You've broken my heart; and the only way you can mend it is to show your affection and sorrow by making me a present of California,

Arizona and New Mexico! . . . Thank you, ever so much!"

Father Lynch threw himself into the war with whole-hearted abandon. It was not that he sympathized with the claims of the stronger nation: we doubt that he troubled much to study those claims. He was after souls, no matter in what camp they fought. He heard confessions as he marched with the American troops to the battlefields, and during the battles tended the wounded of both sides. We know not if he marched with the troops into Mexico City; but we know that wherever he was he was seeking especially those soldiers that had seen Niagara Falls; and no matter how beautiful the sight from the capital of the Incas, the beauty of the Falls must be immeasurably superior. After July 4th, 1848, he found his way back to Galveston, and staggered into the presence of Bishop Odin, only a wreck of what he had been. The robust little Irishman had worn himself to a skeleton. The Bishop told him he must take a prolonged rest; absolutely no more journeyings till he should be himself again. Meanwhile, the Bishop would give him all the news. Yes, he had made another trip to Europe, and had got quite a number of recruits. In France there was an old priest, sixty-two years of age, who was venerated as a saint. He was said even to have worked miracles. Pilgrimages were going from all over the country to his little church. Eight years ago, a woman, seemingly possessed of the devil had screeched at him, "If there were three like you on earth, my kingdom would be destroyed! You have taken from me more than eighty thousand souls!" That's what we need in this country, a few priests like him. Five years ago he was dying in his shabby little rectory. Pilgrims at his church were waiting for him to hear their confessions and to say Mass. Hardly a breath came from the emaciated body. The doctor said, "He cannot live more than thirty minutes, at the most." Those around the bed began the prayers for the dying. The dying man then called upon the Blessed Virgin, giving her the title that most he loved. In a few moments he turned to his friend, the old

schoolmaster that knelt beside the bed, and said, "My friend, I am cured." In sixteen days he was saying Mass again, and hearing confessions, and doing wonders. He is living yet. What was the title under which he invoked the Blessed Virgin? Why, "Our Lady Queen of Angels." She can cure you, too.

Oh, yes, of course you have not heard: I've reserved it for the end: Father Timon has been made a Bishop! Fact! Last October 22nd. Bishop of Buffalo—a new see in the western part of New York. Consecrated in New York City. He has only sixteen priests to cover sixteen counties—one priest to a county. He has four Catholic schools, taught by lay teachers. The only Sisters he has are our Sisters from Emmitsburg: they have an orphanage in Rochester. There was a great time at his reception in Buffalo. You see, when he left the Barrens for his consecration by Bishop Hughes he had a miniature trunk that he could have carried under his arm; but he didn't need anything half so big, because he had hardly any clothes to put into it. He hadn't any money to buy his ticket to New York; but Bishop Rosati gave him his fare. Some friends said to him, "You can't go to New York looking like that!" So they bought him a suit of clothes and gave him \$400. Never had so much money in his life. Don't know what became of the trunk; but when he alighted from the train at Buffalo he had a carpet bag and an umbrella. Lucky he had that umbrella, because it was raining pretty hard. Ten thousand people met him, even though it was ten o'clock at night. They had torches, transparencies, brass bands and everything. They had a carriage for him; but he seemed stupefied. Do you know, they couldn't get him into that carriage? "Oh, no!" said he: "That's too good for an old bishop!" Mind, he calling himself old! He's only fifty-one. Bishops Hughes and McCloskey got into the carriage and as the procession walked up the main street of the town, the people cheered the two riders, and thought that the little man walking behind with the carpet bag was a bell-hop, I guess. They brought him to

St. Louis's Church—a very beautiful one, I'm told. But you'll hardly believe; he was not there more than a few days when the trustees waited on him, and politely requested him to seek another home; people did not wish the Bishop to live there. He'll have trouble with those trustees. Bishop Hughes had trouble with them five years ago; had to interdict the church for a year and four months. Timon thought he had lots of troubles at the Barrens with some of the malcontents that kept writing to Paris until the Superior General made him relinquish the Cincinnati Seminary. He begged the General to let him resign—a visitor in the prime of health asking to resign! But the General wouldn't listen to him. And now they've made him a Bishop! He'll learn what real troubles are! If we only had more priests like him, and like the Cure d'Ars! But, thank God, we have a man like Father Stephen Ryan to succeed him. You'll like your new Provincial.

Father Lynch listened to all the news with sort of a dual consciousness: "Our Lady Queen of Angels!" "Cure d'Ars!" "Bishop Timon in western New York!" "Say," said he, "Isn't Niagara Falls in his diocese?" The Bishop thought so; "Ask him yourself; he'll be down here on November 26th to consecrate our Cathedral." And sure enough, when Bishop Timon came to the consecration, the first question the priest asked, "Isn't Niagara Falls in your diocese? Yes? Well, why don't you let us come and build a seminary for secular priests?"

And the Bishop said: "If you can get the Superior General to allow the confreres to come build a seminary, you can have not only a seminary but a church, also. There are very few Catholics on the States' side of the Falls, but quite a few in Canada." The dream might yet come true! He would see Niagara Falls, and a seminary might be built! What would he name it? Did he get the title "Our Lady of Angels" from hearing of the incidents of Cure d'Ars, or from hearing the possible legend of Hennepin's bark chapel at Lewiston a hundred and seventy years previously? Or from both? Who can tell?

Both Bishops agreed that Father Lynch would not rest in Galveston; a man of his nervous energy must be taken away from the scene of his labors. The very sight of work to be done burns up his nerves. If a shoemaker becomes a nervous wreck you do not tell him to sit quietly in the shop amid his tools and the hillocks of shoes to be mended, do you? The new visitor saw the force of the argument, and told Father Lynch to go to New Orleans for a rest. We presume that Bishop Timon accompanied him thither. But that city was at the time no better for the priest than Galveston; troops were passing through daily from the Texan battlefields to northern barracks. Might as well ask a darkey of the cotton fields to keep his feet still at the strumming of a banjo as ask a priest from the battlefields to keep still while bands are playing and boys are marching. So daily, could be seen marching up Canal Street, the priest beside the lines. The relaxed discipline good-naturedly allowed the soldiers, when convenient, to change from anywhere in a line to the end. The heads of the priest and the soldier on the end would bend slightly to the side; lips would move; the hand of the priest could be seen making a sign of the cross, and the soldier's furtively striking his breast. Then from the priest: "Any other boys in this line going to confession?" After a little while, the priest would pass to the line behind. When a halt would be made, you would see him sit upon a door step, and one by one the soldiers come and kneel on the pavement by his side, totally oblivious of the milling multitudes with their cheering and flag-waving. There was no rest here; so Father Ryan ordered him to come to the Barrens.

We judge that it was about Christmas, 1848, he reached the beloved place after a short stay in St. Louis. We know not his thoughts, but we certainly fancy that one reason for rejoicing was that he was nearer Niagara Falls. The invitation had been given to go and live there; a future seminary and church were awaiting him. The only things necessary were to get permission from the Superior General and get the men.

All the rest would follow. How far to Niagara? Only seven hundred miles! Gorry, he could do that any afternoon—if he got a good start! “Why, I remember once in Ireland a man from Kerry etc., etc.,” . . . Imagination, unlike the cells of the body, never grows old. We do not doubt that his let loose many a dream of boyhood; Maybe it might be a good idea to build this seminary right on the brink of the Falls? Or possibly, arch the mainland and Goat Island with a stone bridge, say, ninety feet wide; and build your five storied seminary on the bridge. Then you would have the Rapids in your cellar. The cellar could have windows in the floor, so you could look through to the waters. Then, too, you could build a veranda over the Cataract; it would then be practically in your front yard. Wonder if you could hear the morning rising bell in the thunder of the Falls? Who are looking at the Falls now? Are they dreaming in the cold as now I sit by the hearth and dream?

The Bishop, evidently, had told him at their meeting in Galveston that one of his sixteen priests was a Father John Boyle, and he was tending the few Catholics on the American side; he had for about a year now little churches at Youngstown, Lewiston and the Falls. No, Father Boyle did not live at the Falls, but at Lewiston. What would puzzle the ex-chaplain would be this: Why would the priest not live near the Falls when he had a chance so to do? Three years after that Galveston conversation, a Father Stephens, the successor of Father Boyle, did that very thing—built the church at Suspension Bridge, and moved his residence from Lewiston, while still retaining charge of the beautiful little valley. That must have met with Father Lynch’s hearty approval; there was a man that appreciated beauty!

But other things than that had been happening about the Falls. While he was wrestling with mules in Texas, Niagara Falls guides were wrestling with the train-loads of tourists that came especially on the two trains a day from Buffalo to swell the permanent population of six hundred. Three of the

guides were named (appropriately) Hooker & Sons; and they wrote a guidebook that would make the tourists almost weep at the sheer beauty of the descriptions. And John W. Orr wrote "A Pictorial Guide" that would make Pompey's statue run tears of blood, particularly over Lewiston, the village "hallowed by an air of subdued softness and religious-like repose." And the telegraph lines that had begun in the world at Washington in 1843 were now, in the Christmas of 1848 beginning to tap the outside world, and to flash to the cities the news of distant places. But to the dreamer by the hearth at the Barrens no dispatches were comparable with those that told of happenings at Niagara Falls.