

FATHER MATHEW:

A BIOGRAPHY.

CHAPTER I.

Born in Thomastown House—His Family—His Infancy—His singular Gentleness and Goodness as a Child—Hiding the Spoons—His influence over his brothers—His Love of Order—The silk Stockings—Taste for Engineering—The Gentlemen with the Tail—Is to be a Priest—His walk from School—Enters and quits Maynooth—Is ordained—His first Sermon—His first Mission in Kilkenny—The Regular Orders—Cause of his leaving Kilkenn.

SOME five miles west of Cashel, the ancient capital of the County of Tipperary, and at the head of a fertile plain, running westward between the Kilmanagh and Galtee range of mountains, locally well known as the 'Golden Vale,' there stands a noble mansion in the midst of a still nobler demesne. Its name is Thomastown. And here, on the 10th of October 1790, Theobald Mathew was born. Thomastown was for many generations the property of a high county family, famous for its wealth and extravagance, and notable in the records of both Houses of the Irish Parliament, but now utterly extinct. The park, two thousand acres in extent, is still in high repute, in a county in which timber is not over abundant, for its long beech avenues, its venerable oaks, and its massive chestnuts, which rival those of Bushy. Pleasure grounds, pieces of ornamental water, and long formal terraces

in the old style, lie around Thomastown House—an immense, long-winged castellated pile, not more than two hundred years old. An interesting account of its builder, and of the mode of life he adopted, can be found in Sheridan's 'Life of Swift,' together with a circumstantial narrative of the Dean's visit to Thomastown, and his entertainment there. It is now the property of the Viscount de Chabot, the representative of an illustrious French line, to whom, as the nearest surviving relative, the estate was directly bequeathed by the Lady Elizabeth, or Ellisha (as she is styled in the old peerages) Mathew, daughter of the first and sister of the second and last Earl Llandaff, an eccentric but kind-hearted spinster, of whom further mention must be made hereafter.

With the trunk line of the Mathew family, traced back to Rader, in Glamorgan, by Mervyn Archdale, and other genealogy-compilers after him, this biography has nought to do. Such authentic particulars as can be procured at this time of Father Mathew's immediate family, one of the branch lines, and the only one with any representatives now left, are scanty in the extreme. We know this much for certain—that some time in the second half of the last century, the date of which event cannot be given with accuracy, John Mathew of Thurles married a Miss O'Rahill, a member of a respectable family; that this couple died shortly after their marriage, leaving two daughters* and a son, James Mathew; and that George Mathew of Thomastown, afterwards Baron and first Earl of Llandaff, adopted and educated the orphan boy. In due time James grew to manhood, when he found himself in a very little better position than that of a dependent upon the bounty of his patron; but it is clear that his protector did not neglect the charge he voluntarily assumed,

* Both of the daughters were married—one to Francis Kearney, Esq., whose grandson, the Rev. Dr. Kearney, is Military Chaplain at Ballincollig, and Rector of Carrigrohan, Co. Cork; the other to John Hunt, Esq.—Protestant gentlemen of good position.

for James Mathew remained constantly at Thomastown, and during the long absences of the owner of that grand old place was entrusted with the management of the household and establishment.

While still resident here, he married Anne, daughter of George Whyte, Esq., of Cappa Whyte, she being then in her sixteenth year, and endowed with considerable personal beauty. Even this important step did not sever his connection with Thomastown, for he continued to dwell there for several years afterwards. Children were rapidly born to James and Anne Mathew. The fourth son, named Theobald, was the future founder of the Temperance movement in Ireland. So was it that Thomastown was the place of his birth and infancy.

About the year 1795, James Mathew, finding a young family quickly springing up, and wishing, no doubt, to secure for himself some more permanent footing in the world than his position in Thomastown promised, took a large farm, with a commodious dwelling-house upon it, called Rathcloheen, in the immediate vicinity of Thomastown House; transported thither his wife and children, and so set up for himself. This change he effected without any cessation of kindness and good-will on the part of the now ennobled master of the soil. Lands were let to James Mathew upon easy terms; his flocks and cattle grazed gratuitously upon the rich pastures of the demesne; and things going on well with him, he soon became prosperous and even wealthy, in those halcyon days for farmers of the war time. As years rolled on, no less than twelve children, nine boys and three girls, were born to him. Of these—one having died in her childhood—but one brother and two sisters are now left; and from them, as they were much younger than their priest-brother, but little can be gathered of Theobald Mathew's earlier years.

Theobald was, from his infancy, the favourite child of

his mother. There was something singularly sweet and engaging in the boy, which drew the mother's heart towards him; and his own love for her, which was evidenced in a hundred child-like ways, strengthened the mutual attachment. By his mother's side he preferred passing the hours the others spent in play; and he was consequently somewhat scornfully designated 'the Pet' by his brothers and sisters. At Thomastown House, too, before and after his father's quitting it for Rathcloheen, he was in higher estimation than the rest of the young people. The Earl's daughter, Lady Elizabeth, some fifteen or twenty years the boy's senior, formed an affection for him which never waned during her life.

It does not always happen that the characteristics of the future man are to be traced in the impulses of the child; but in the impulses as well as the habits of the fine sturdy handsome boy, the joy and pride of his fond mother, one may behold, though in modified form, the very same remarkable characteristics of the man who for many years occupied a prominent position in the world, and who owed his singular power over his fellow-man more to the influence of a loving and beneficent nature, than to intellectual superiority or preeminence. In one respect especially the child and the man were identical. From his earliest years, the desire to afford pleasure to others, to be the means of conferring happiness on some one human creature, was his most marked characteristic. Even at this period of his life, this desire had assumed the form of a confirmed habit, which, as years rolled on, became almost as uncontrollable as a passion. Young Theobald, or Toby, as he was familiarly styled, had rather an aversion to the rude sports of his brothers and their young friends and playfellows, although he was gay and cheerful as boys usually are. But while the hardy young fellows were engaged in play, or were absent on some expedition through the woods of Thomastown, Theobald was cer-

tain to be found in close attendance on his mother, expressing his love for that fond and indulgent parent in artless prattle, or satisfying his affection by clinging to the skirt of her robe, and looking up into her face, with his sweet innocent glance, beaming from the loveliest eyes of clear limpid blue. Though this strong attachment to his mother, which had a peculiar influence upon his after life, filling him with reverence for good and holy women, was a source of constant ridicule to his brothers, who called him 'the Pet,' addressed him as 'Miss Molly,' and accused him of being always 'tied to his mother's apron-string;' still, from an early age, he acquired an influence over them which they never attempted to dispute or resist, and which he retained and they felt to the last moment of their connection in this world. The boy was in many respects different from other boys. Not only was he most lovable, from his goodness and gentleness, and his invariable habit of seeking to afford pleasure to others; but there was a sweet gravity, even a dignity, in the manner of the child, which was most remarkable at such a period of life. While tied to his mother's apron-string, as his brothers declared him to be, he was not unmindful of their interests, or indifferent to their marked partiality for good things; for he employed the influence which he derived from his mother's love, to coax from her the materials for a little feast, of which he was to be the proud dispenser, and with which it was his delight to surprise them, as they returned home, rosy with health and exercise, and with the appetites of young wolves. To procure a feast—to preside over it—to witness the relish with which the sweet things were, not to say despatched, but devoured—this was a kind of passion with this mere child. Not that he was by any means personally indifferent to such delicacies—what healthy boy ever was?—but that he derived more pleasure from bestowing them on his brothers than in sharing them with them.

When a very little fellow, he was particularly partial to

plum-pudding, for which delicacy, it may be said, he never entirely lost his relish. In after years, he took pleasure in telling how, one Christmas, while the family were still at Thomastown, he quietly secreted, beneath the cushion of a great old-fashioned chair, the silver spoons which had been used with the plum-pudding. Great was the consternation of the servants, and awful the amazement—the utter stupefaction—of the butler, at the sudden and unaccountable disappearance of the plate. The servants were in a lamentable state of alarm, naturally dreading that suspicion should fall upon them; and as for the family, they did not know what to think of the strange occurrence. At length, Theobald confessed, and not without some degree of pride, that he had put them away in a safe place, so that they might be ready at hand when the next Christmas brought with it its customary pudding. Upon which confession, which relieved many a heart from a load of uneasiness, Lord Llandaff, who was one of the kindest of men, promised his young favourite that, instead of waiting for Christmas, which was then a year distant, there should be a plum-pudding every Sunday—a promise which was received with a vehement shout of delight. This incident occurred while he was yet a very little fellow; but the recollection of Lord Llandaff's kindness never faded from the retentive and grateful memory of Theobald Mathew.

Though Theobald was the fourth child, with three brothers older than himself, it was singular to observe how he led them, as if by natural right, and how they yielded to him and obeyed him quite as a matter of course. His brothers seemed to feel as if he were different from themselves; and in more respects than one this difference really existed. He never joined in any cruel sport, or willingly inflicted pain upon a living thing. Coursing, and shooting, and ferretting, in which his young companions indulged, and of their proficiency in which they were boastfully proud, he detested with

all his heart. He once witnessed, with horror and compassion, the agony of a poor hunted hare, in her breathless struggles with the fierce dogs; and from that moment he held the sport in abhorrence. The sight of a shattered wing or blood-stained breast of a bird, brought down by his brother's gun, filled the heart of the boy with a sense of pain; for his impulse was to succour and befriend, not to persecute or destroy. Then he was never known to have uttered, not to say an improper word, or word of dubious meaning, but even a light word; and a harsh or unkind expression towards any person was never known to have fallen from his lips. In this respect, as in many others, the child was indeed the father of the man.

In after life, he was remarkable for his love of order, his neatness of dress, and the propriety which, in spite of his voluntary poverty, distinguished the arrangements of his modest dwelling. To find anything out of its right place was, to him, a source of annoyance; it offended against his sense of order and regularity. An incident is told of him, which displays this peculiarity manifesting itself at a very early age. While still at Thomastown, he happened to see, in the breakfast-parlour, a pair of silk stockings on the back of a chair before the fire, where they had been placed, perhaps with a view to their being 'aired' previously to being worn. The indignant disgust of Master Toby may be imagined when it is said that he tore the offending articles from the chair, and flung them into the fire, where they were soon destroyed. As may be supposed, there was a keen search made for the stockings, which were of a valuable kind, and there was much astonishment at their mysterious disappearance. At last, as a desperate resource, Toby was asked if he had seen the missing articles. 'I did,' said the little fellow, 'and I burned them, too.' 'Burned them!—why did you do such a thing, you bold boy?' was the very natural question. 'They had no right to be in the breakfast-parlour;

that was no place for them,' said the boy, sturdily. 'Toby is right,' said Lady Elizabeth Mathew; 'they should not have been put there.' Lady Elizabeth, who was then about twenty-five years of age, thought the loss of her stockings fully compensated by the lesson administered to her attendants from the lips of a child.

Between Rathcloheen and Thomastown, where he was ever sure of being received with affection by Lady Elizabeth, Theobald's early years were happily passed. As each successive year rolled by, he was more an object of love and admiration to young as well as old. This may seem to savour somewhat of exaggeration, when said of a mere child—a boy, with a boy's willfulness; but it will appear more probable when the loving gentle sweet nature of the child is considered—when it is remembered that he was always striving, with kindly ingenuity, to procure some indulgence or gratification for others—for his brothers, who looked up to and obeyed him—for the servants, who adored him—for the poor, who were never tired of invoking blessings on the head of their young benefactor, and who looked upon him as a 'born saint.'

The strange influence which he acquired over his brothers, three of whom were his seniors, was displayed in various ways. Theobald was somewhat of an engineer. The farmyard and out-offices as well as the dwelling-house of Rathcloheen were indebted for their supply of water to a small stream, which flowed from Thomastown demesne. During the winter it amply sufficed for every purpose, but in the heat of summer the little stream shrank in its bed, and afforded but a scanty supply to the varied wants of the establishment. This partial failure, which was of annual occurrence, excited the interest of Theobald, not alone on account of the practical inconvenience which the loss of the pure element occasioned, but also from the love which he felt for the stream that prattled with such musical voice

over its shallow bed, or flashed so brightly in the sunlight; and on a fine summer day there might have been seen a handsome boy, in the midst of a group of fine lads, all bigger than himself, working away with spade or shovel of appropriate dimensions, deepening the channel, improving its levels, or directing its scanty but precious waters into a better course. Many years after these feats of infant engineering, he never could see a rill of spring water running to waste without considering how it might be turned to the best advantage for the use of man; so vivid and lasting, with this impressionable and tenacious nature, were the events and memories of his youthful days.

If Theobald were the 'Pet' of his mother and the 'Miss Molly' of the house, he was not on that account in any way deficient in courage, moral or physical. Quite the contrary, as a rather singular instance will prove. There lived, some half dozen miles from his father's house, a gentleman, to whom alleged acts of cruelty to the peasantry in the time of the Rebellion, then fresh in the memory of all classes, had attached an evil fame. So wicked and inhuman had been the conduct of this gentleman, that the people in the neighbourhood declared he was 'the ould boy himself, all out;' and more than one village gossip, in the blacksmith's forge, or by the kitchen hob, was willing to 'take her Bible' that the object of her horror was gifted with a tail; though the horns, it was admitted, were not ordinarily visible. Theobald heard the story, perhaps, from one of his many pensioned crones, who crossed herself devoutly as she described to her 'darling Master Toby' the supernatural appendage of the gentleman of evil reputation. The strange story, which was firmly believed in by the servants of the house, seized fast hold of the lad's imagination, and he resolved to satisfy himself, by personal inspection, whether Mr. — were in reality so wonderfully and so unpleasantly endowed. Accordingly, he rose early one morning, and having saddled

his pony with his own hands, he galloped or trotted on his journey of more than half a dozen miles, till he reached the gate of the gentleman's demesne; and there, partly concealed by a projecting portion of the wall, he remained for hours, seated firmly on his pony's back, waiting in the hope of seeing Mr. — come forth, and thus afford him the opportunity of satisfying his curiosity. He had his trouble for nothing, for no Mr. — was to be seen that day; and Toby was at length compelled, by hunger more than by weariness, to turn his pony's head homewards. In a few years after this strange expedition, he met the same gentleman in society, and then convinced himself that, whatever the interior man might have been, the exterior was nowise different from that of ordinary mortals.

The boy seemed to be marked out by nature for something different from other boys. His kindness, gentleness, and unselfishness; his sweet and cheerful gravity; his tender compassion for the poor, the lame, the blind, and the sick—including a liberal proportion of impostors among them—who thronged the door-steps and invaded the spacious kitchen of his father's hospitable house; his wonderful reverence for God's name, which he never lightly pronounced—all marked out Theobald, especially in the estimation of the women of the household, as the future 'Priest of the family.' Mrs. Mathew was a pious Catholic, and, like most good mothers of her creed in Ireland, she hoped to see one of her many sons dedicated to the service of religion. One of the elder boys was 'intended' for the Church; and a namesake and relative had actually presented him, or his mother for him, with a costly suit of vestments and a valuable chalice; but, much to his mother's regret, George's 'vocation' proved to be rather a passing impulse, than that irresistible attraction towards the sanctuary which so many young people in Ireland experience at an early age, and which enables them to overcome every obstacle, and resist

every temptation to a worldly career. One day, while her now numerous family surrounded the spacious dinner-table, the good lady, looking round with natural pride at her little army of handsome healthy boys, almost involuntarily exclaimed—'Is it not unfortunate! I have nine sons, and not one of them to be a priest!' The boys glanced at George, and blushing George fixed his eyes steadily upon his plate. But the silence was soon broken; for scarcely had the words, which so truly expressed the inmost thoughts of the speaker, been uttered, when Theobald started from his chair, and cried out, with a voice full of emotion, 'Mother, don't be uneasy; I will be a priest.' His mother folded him in her arms, expressing her delight and gratitude in kisses and blessings; and from that moment Theobald Mathew was looked upon as dedicated and belonging to the Church. From that moment, also, his influence over his brothers, which had been singularly great before, was confirmed and increased; which influence, gathering strength as years rolled on, was not always to their personal advantage in after life.

When he had reached his twelfth year, Lady Elizabeth, his constant friend and protectress, announced her intention of educating him at her own cost. She selected for him a school of good repute in Kilkenny, to which he was accordingly sent. Love for his family and kindred was ever with Theobald Mathew one of the strongest and most ardent feelings of his nature. This feeling was nurtured and strengthened in the bosom of a happy home. It was warmed into early vigour in the sunshine of domestic affection, and was never chilled or nipped by coldness or unkindness. While in the school at Kilkenny, he yielded to an uncontrollable desire to see his parents and family, and enjoy in their beloved society the festival of Easter. Without acquainting anyone of his intention, he set out on foot on a journey of between thirty and forty miles; but, sus-

tained by the strong feeling with which he was animated, the affectionate boy got through it bravely, and at the close of a long day arrived, weary and foot-sore, at his father's house, where he was received in the arms of his delighted mother, who only thought of his love for her, and her joy at the unexpected meeting, and hinted no word of rebuke as she strained him to her breast. Many a time, ay a full half century after, did Father Mathew tell of that sweet greeting, which more than repaid the young traveller for the toil and fatigue of that tremendous undertaking.

The late Mr. Richard Sullivan, who for some years represented Kilkenny in Parliament, was a school-fellow of his; and he was often heard to say that there was no more popular boy, nor one more universally beloved by teachers and students, than Theobald Mathew. His mother was frequently gladdened by the tidings of her favourite son's progress in his studies. By no means a brilliant boy, he was attentive and studious, and of good natural parts. The President of the academy, the Rev. Patrick Magrath, was a man of keen discrimination as well as of sound scholarship; and he entertained a high opinion of the capacity of his amiable and attractive pupil, whose attention to his studies and invariably exemplary conduct were the constant theme of his praise.

A writer in the 'Dublin Review,' who wrote of Theobald Mathew in after years, when his name was famous, thus describes him as a boy—the father of the future man; corroborating to the letter the account given of him by the surviving members of his family:—

The writer of this article has been intimately acquainted with the Rev. Theobald Mathew from his earliest boyhood, and he can truly say, that even at that early stage of life he knew nobody so much or so generally beloved as the individual who is now the 'observed of all observers' throughout Ireland. Incapable of anger or resentment, utterly free from selfishness, always anxious to share with others

whatever he possessed, jealous of the affections of those to whom he was particularly attached, remarkably gentle in his manners, fond of expressing himself rather in similes than in language; averse from the boisterous amusements to which boys in general are prone, and preferring to them quiet walks by the banks of a river, or by the side of green hedges; in company with two or three select associates, and yet very far from being of a pensive disposition—on the contrary, so cheerful that the slightest ludicrous occurrence turned the smile he generally wore into hearty laughter—he grew up esteemed by everybody who knew him. Even in his boyhood he seemed never to live for himself; and yet by not seeking it he exercised an influence upon those around him, which they never thought of questioning. Such was his character in his early days. And when the writer of these lines, after an interval of thirty years or more, visited Mr. Mathew in the autumn of 1838, he could discern no change in the outlines of that character, except that it was accompanied by a greater degree of physical activity, acquired from almost incessant motion in the performance of sacerdotal or charitable engagements, which seemed to have no end throughout the whole day.

Having gone through the usual course of studies necessary as a preparation for Maynooth, he was sent to that college under the auspices of the Most Reverend Dr. Bray, and matriculated in the Humanity Class, on the 10th of September, 1807.

When the young student entered that famous college, its president was the Very Reverend Dr. Montague, a learned scholar and divine. Theobald Mathew was not destined to finish his scholastic career in the halls of Maynooth. The rules of that institution were then, as now, strict in their character, and rigid in their enforcement. Thus, for instance, it is not allowed that one student shall visit another in his room; as, were it lawful to do so, irregularities and abuses would be likely to follow in consequence; one of which would be the interruption to the studies, which, at a certain period of the year, the student prosecutes in private. But if two or more students assemble in the room of one of them for the purpose of eating, which is defined

in the technical phraseology of the college by the term '*commessatio*,' they do so at the risk of expulsion. It may have been that young Mathew did not regard this rule in its serious aspect, or that the temptation of feast-giving was too strong for his powers of resistance; but it is the fact that he violated the rule in a marked manner, by giving a party to a few of his special friends among the students; and the meeting being of a convivial character, the attention of the authorities was attracted to a circumstance extraordinary and unlooked-for in such a place. The master of the feast was at once put under censure; but anticipating expulsion as the result of the formal investigation which was to be held in due course, he quitted the college of his own will, and thus probably avoided what would have been regarded by many, who would never have too closely scrutinised the real cause of offence, as a stigma upon his moral character. The offence, which was quite venial in its nature, was just the one which Theobald Mathew was most likely to commit. It will be seen that it was but a manifestation of that habit of giving, that love for affording pleasure to, or conferring happiness on others, which was one of the most marked characteristics, indeed passions, of his beneficent nature. He left the college in 1808. The time, however, was to come when he, who then hurriedly passed from its walls, was to be received within them with such honours as are but rarely accorded to, and more rarely deserved by man from his fellows—when he was to be hailed with affectionate reverence by venerable priests and learned professors, and with tumultuous acclamations by warm-hearted and enthusiastic students. One might be disposed to think that this unexpected severance of his connection with Maynooth was specially intended by Providence: for, had he gone through the usual course in the classes of that college, he might have become a rural parish priest, even have worn the

mitre; and though he was certain of being beloved by his flock, whether of a parish or a diocese, the world at large would, in all human probability, never have heard of the name of Father Mathew.

Stimulated by the edifying example as much as impressed by the poverty of two aged friars, the representatives of the Capuchin Order in Kilkenny, he determined on attaching himself to that lowliest and least influential of the regular orders in Ireland; and, with that object in view, he proceeded to Dublin, where he placed himself under the spiritual care of the Very Reverend Celestine Corcoran of that city. And on Easter Saturday, in the year 1814, he was ordained by the most Reverend Dr. Murray, a prelate whose apostolic virtues commanded the reverence even of his bitterest opponents. That solemn act was the commencement of a friendship which, increasing as years rolled over the heads of the Archbishop and the Priest, terminated only in death. Dr. Murray was through life the faithful friend and powerful supporter of Father Mathew.

On this memorable Easter Saturday was his mother's long-cherished ambition for her beloved son fully gratified. He was now what she had hoped to see him—a priest of the sanctuary, whose voice would be heard in the pulpit, whose consecrated hands would minister at the altar.

It was while on a brief visit to his home, that he was presented with a chalice, one of the most acceptable offerings which can be made to a young priest; and upon its base he had subsequently engraved these words—'*Pray for the souls of James and Anne Mathew, of Thomastown*'—thus associating their honoured names and sacred memories with the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. This was the chalice which he invariably used in private, and to which he was particularly attached.

His first sermon was delivered in the parish chapel of Kilfeacle, in his native county of Tipperary. It was on the

occasion of his saying Mass for the priest. He read and explained the Gospel of the day, which proclaims the startling announcement, that it is more difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. His principal auditor of this his first sermon was a village magnate and millionaire, Mr. Scully—considered to be one of the richest men in Tipperary. This rural Croesus was much struck with the discourse, which was not a little enhanced by the singularly youthful and interesting appearance of the preacher, who rightly explained that it was not the *possession* of riches which was culpable in the sight of God, but the disposition or *use* made of them. Mr. Scully was a very large as well as a very rich man; and meeting the preacher at breakfast, he expressed his personal acknowledgements thus: 'Father Mathew; I feel very much obliged to you for trying to squeeze *me* through the eye of a needle.' The old gentleman was at that time corpulent enough to have blocked up the Camel's Gate of Jerusalem.

Father Mathew's first mission was in Kilkenny, where he joined the small community of Capuchins. The community was small and poor, and their church was not particularly well attended prior to his becoming attached to it. But soon after his arrival a very striking change was effected. The Friary, as it was called, became, ere long, not only popular, but fashionable, thronged by the poor and frequented by the rich. The fame of the young Friar spread rapidly through that Catholic city, and his virtues were the theme of every tongue. His personal appearance was of itself sufficient to excite interest, and his manners quite harmonised with his outward form. In the first bloom and freshness of early manhood, graceful and elegant in his figure and carriage, with a countenance of singular beauty, of expression even more than of feature; winning of speech, polished of address, modest and unobtrusive—the youthful priest was

calculated to create the most favourable impression. Those who remember him at that period of his life speak of the extraordinary beauty of his countenance, and the indescribable sweetness of its expression—so good, and pure, and holy—'something angelic'—reflecting faithfully the inward soul. But personal attractions, however they might have commanded attention, or even fascinated for the moment, would soon have failed to influence in his favour, had they not been accompanied by those sterling qualities of mind and heart, as well as that wonderful zeal for the cause of religion, which Father Mathew brought with him to the duties of his sacred calling.

It was in the unobtrusive but onerous and important duties of the confessional that he first distinguished himself. In that confined and comfortless 'box' he was certain to be found almost at any hour, even from the earliest in the morning to the latest at night, during which the chapel was open to the faithful. Here was the principal theatre of his priestly mission; receiving, under the most solemn seal of confidence, the sad story of the sinner, consoling the afflicted, cheering and fortifying the weary spirit, strengthening the feeble against temptation, guiding and directing by his advice and counsel. The poor, as usual, were the first to appreciate his worth; and they, by their lavish praise of the 'new director,' attracted the attention of those of a different class, with whom the youthful priest became an object of the deepest interest, and even veneration. Young as he was in years, and younger still in experience of the world, his advice, even in matters not altogether strictly within the province of a clergyman, was eagerly sought for by many whose hair was streaked with the silver of age. Nor was his advice without its value; for, to an instinctive uprightness, and a stern sense of justice, he united great natural shrewdness and sagacity, with clearness and soundness of judgement.

Even at this early period of his ministry, his efforts as a

preacher were more successful than might have been supposed from the extreme thinness and weakness of his yet undeveloped voice. But there was the one great and much-atoned charm—the evident sincerity of the preacher. Thin and weak, almost shrieking, as his voice was at this time, it reached the heart of the listener, stirring its inmost recesses, and quickening its pulsation with sympathetic fervour. Few men were ever animated with a more ardent love of God and humanity than that which glowed in the breast of Father Mathew, as his whole career testifies; and that sacred love breathed in every word that he spoke from the altar or the pulpit. It is not here necessary to allude to him further as a preacher; for he shortly quitted Kilkenny for Cork, the scene of his future missionary labours, and likewise of his world-wide fame as a great moral reformer.

While in Kilkenny, the benevolence and charity which were the leading features of his character sought every opportunity for their constant exercise. The boy was here repeated in the man. He was never happy unless in doing good. To confer happiness on others seemed to be the instinctive craving of his nature. Had he a pound in his possession, it was only so long as there was no poor person near him with whom he could share it; but had he anything left, after having relieved the wants of the necessitous, it was his greatest delight to surround himself with a few chosen friends, whom he entertained with a warmth and grace of hospitality that specially distinguished him. The boy feast-giver of Thomastown and Rathcloheen was now the modest entertainer of the Capuchin convent in Kilkenny.

His departure from Kilkenny was one of the great events as well as the turning-point of his life. It assisted to place him in that position in which he had the opportunity of best displaying those noble qualities which gathered round him the love and admiration of his fellow-men, and prepared the way for that extraordinary career which rendered the name

and character and labours of the humble friar the pride of his country and the property of mankind. It may therefore be not unfitting to explain the cause of his leaving Kilkenny, and taking up his residence in Cork.

At the time when Father Mathew commenced the duties of his ministry, the Catholic Church of Ireland was but slowly emerging from a persecution which had endured, with greater or less severity, and with but occasional snatches of repose, almost from the period of the Reformation. But upon no branch of the Irish Church had that persecution fallen so heavily as upon the Regular Orders. And not only had the Regular Orders to endure the worst malignity of laws conceived in a spirit of hate, and born of fierce and sanguinary times, when passion or selfish policy alone influenced the legislators of those days; but they had also to endure the restraints imposed upon them by more than one bishop of their own Church, in whose diocese the feeble representatives of once proud and illustrious orders sought an asylum, established their poor convent, erected their little chapel, and pursued their mission of unostentatious but active usefulness.

Mr. Fitzpatrick, in his admirable 'Life of Dr. Doyle,' writing of this period, indeed almost of the very year which saw Father Mathew a Capuchin friar in the little convent of Kilkenny, uses these words:—'The Irish friars, at this period, were slighted to such an extent by even the prelates and priests of their own religion, that the Holy See was obliged formally to interfere;' and Mr. Fitzpatrick quotes an official letter from Cardinal Litta to Archbishop Troy, dated the 14th of October 1815, in which the bitter complaints made by the 'Regulars of Ireland' are set forth.

The order to which the young priest attached himself, very much from the humility of his nature, was one of the poorest and most neglected at that time in the country, and certainly offered no worldly attractions to those who joined

its few and feeble communities. Of the different subdivisions of the order of Minorites founded by Francis of Assisi, the Capuchins, or cowled, who followed the rigorous precepts laid down by Matthew Barchi, three hundred years after the death of the great saint, were the humblest and most mortified. To this section, represented at that time in Ireland by a few priests in the most important towns, Father Mathew freely and of his own choice attached himself; and with them he cast his lot in the Church. In these kingdoms the Catholic clergy, secular and regular, have but one means of support,—the voluntary contributions of the people. There are, for them, no endowments, no glebes, no rent-charges, no Ecclesiastical Commissioners—the said functionaries being, it may be supposed, superfluous in connection with the Catholic Church. By the people alone are the churches built, the educational and charitable institutions maintained, the Bishops and Parish Priests and Curates, the Monks and Friars of various orders, supported, sheltered, and clothed throughout the entire country. Fifty years since, the priest was necessarily a heavier burden upon the people than he is now. A hundred years ago the Catholic population of Ireland did not exceed a million and a half of souls; and, consequently, when the Church began to revive after her long and dreary night of suffering, and her oppressors at length discovered that no enactment could crush her out of existence, or diminish her vitality, and so gave up actively oppressing, without however repealing the disgraceful laws which continued the power of oppression, the Catholic Bishops endeavoured to keep the number of priests within the closest limits compatible with supplying the spiritual wants of their respective flocks. While acknowledging the value of the Regular Orders, the Irish Bishops, were they so inclined, could scarcely encourage their coming among their already overburdened people, who would have to support them in

addition to their ordinary pastors; and this policy, on the part of the bishops generally, and which in some dioceses assumed the regularity of a system, led to much unhappiness amongst those Regulars who ventured to establish themselves in the different towns. This condition of affairs, so far from deterring, rather induced Father Mathew to join the Capuchins, whose watchword—'*humility*'—was the guiding principle of his life.

As it has been already stated, the young priest had not been long in Kilkenny before his worth was discovered. The Friary, which was not particularly well attended previously, became popular; his confessional was constantly crowded; and the people, rich as well as poor, came to him for advice and consolation. But his career in this the first scene of his missionary labours was soon brought to an end. In certain dioceses the Regulars were more restricted than in others. As a rule, they were not endowed with 'functions'—the power of administering Baptism and Extreme Unction, the first and last Sacraments. Their chapels, too, were under particular regulations. For instance, parishioners were not permitted to approach the Paschal Communion within their walls, and friars were restrained from administering it, though at all other seasons except Easter it was permitted. Also, friars could not perform the marriage ceremony without special permission. There were other distinctions between Seculars and Regulars; but those mentioned were the most remarkable. Many of them hold to this day, and, it must be remarked, without having their justice or necessity questioned.

A circumstance occurred which brought his mission in Kilkenny to a rather abrupt and unexpected termination. The bishop in those days was the Right Rev. Dr. Marum, a highly educated and conscientious man, with however very strong notions of church discipline. On Saturday evening, Father Mathew was, as usual, in his confessional, the doors

of which were besieged by a crowd of penitents awaiting their turn for admission. He was closely engaged in his sacred duty, when an ecclesiastic entered the chapel, walked direct to his confessional, and handed him in a document of an urgent nature. Father Mathew opened it, read the first few lines, rose from his seat, and departed humbly from the church, saying to his anxious flock, who felt that something strange was about to happen—'Go to your other clergymen; I have no power to hear your confession any longer.' He had received a command from the bishop to cease hearing confessions, on the alleged ground of his having, contrary to the regulations of the diocese, administered Paschal Communion. A report spread abroad that Father Mathew had been suspended, and the circumstance under which he had received the order from the bishop gave some show of probability to the rumour. It was but a rumour; yet the deprivation so imposed cut him to the soul. He determined to leave Kilkenny without delay, and seek some other diocese; which intention he put into immediate execution. The bishop discovered, when too late, that the complaint on which he so rigorously acted was entirely groundless, and that the young friar had never infringed the regulations of the diocese. Explanations and apologies were offered; but his resolution was not to be changed, and he hastened his departure from the scene of his first mission. Ever after, the bishop deplored his own hastiness in this transaction, and did all in his power to lighten the effects of a blow which he could not recall.

CHAPTER II.

The Little Friary—Father Arthur O'Leary—His Character and Influence—New Coat for St. Patrick—Reply to the Quaker—Father Donovan—Saved from the Guillotine—Attending the Condemned—How the Shirts went—Father Donovan obtains a Colleague, and provides for his Reception—Father Donovan's Ambition—'Moll in the Wad'—Father Mathew little known at first—Confessional of a Popular Priest—Devotedness of Father Mathew's Friendship.

REMOTE from the din of traffic, and shut out from the public eye, there then, and for many years after, existed in the city of Cork a little chapel of humble pretensions both as to appearance and accommodation. This diminutive place of worship had been erected by a celebrated member of the Capuchin Order, a man whose strong and powerful intellect and scholarly attainments were devoted as well to the defence of his persecuted or endangered faith, as to the promotion of liberal and tolerant opinions, and the maintenance of social order. This was the famous Father Arthur O'Leary. As a priest, he was pious, zealous, charitable; as a public writer, he was bold, eloquent, of lively fancy, and replete with that humorous vein which is so useful to a cause, and so damaging to an opponent. Fearless and formidable champion to the oppressed, as he proved himself to be during many trying years, while the mass of his countrymen were slowly emerging from an oppression against which it seemed almost useless to contend, it was only natural that Father O'Leary should be loved and honoured by those of his own communion; while his earnest advocacy of toleration and Christian concord