

CHAPTER XV.

Father Mathew an Advocate of Law and Order—Warns the People against Secret Societies—Denounces Blood-spilling—His Rage for making 'Converts'—The Victim of Lemonade—The Deserters.

FATHER MATHEW was not only the preacher of temperance, but also the most earnest advocate of law and order. Those crimes which occasionally startled the public mind, and brought odium and disgrace upon the country, were denounced in unsparing terms by the good priest, to whose kindly and generous nature cruelty and violence were peculiarly abhorrent. Against secret societies, those pestilent nurseries of outrage, he constantly raised his voice, oftentimes with the happiest result. On several occasions, for instance, in the year 1842, he availed himself of the occurrence of some remarkable outrage to address the most salutary warnings to masses of the peasantry throughout every district of the country.

At Lucan, near Dublin, he thus referred to the machinations of the secret societies, and called upon his hearers to beware of their villainous emissaries. This was in June 1842 :—

I am sorry to hear, from a respected clergyman, that emissaries are in the habit of going into the coffee-rooms where teetotallers meet, for the purpose of ensnaring them into becoming members of Ribbon Societies. My dear friends, I caution you not to join them, whatever name they bear. If any of those emissaries address you, at once disclose the matter to your clergyman, or to the next magistrate; for these bloodthirsty wretches only seek to betray you, and, having

effected their object, they would then go to a foreign land, there to live on the blood-money.

In the following month, at a meeting held in the county Tipperary, he again warns the people against the snares of those wicked organisations :—

I have seen with the deepest regret, that it has been imputed to the district of Newport that secret societies exist there. This I am afflicted to hear—that any district where the temperance cause has been established could harbour such societies. I have always, earnestly, perseveringly, emphatically, cautioned the people against those societies, because they are filled with danger, with vice, with iniquity—because they cut at the roots of social order—because they are the blight and bane of social happiness. I hope most earnestly that the people of Newport will use their best efforts to eradicate such societies, if any of them yet remain, and that they will persevere until every trace of them is obliterated. The authors and concoctors of those societies have no good object in view; they only think how they can ensnare the unsuspecting into their hellish toils, and then they sell their victims to the offended laws of the country for the wages of iniquity. Beware of these wolves in sheep's clothing—they steal upon their intended victim under the disguise of assumed friendship; but they are only thinking of the blood-money at the time. My venerable and respected friend, Dr. Healy, who was the first of the clergy of the Archdiocese to join the standard of temperance, has at all times cautioned his people against those societies; and I trust, most confidently, that the words of that exemplary priest will be listened to with attention, and that his warning voice will be heard amongst them.

In December of the same year, and in the presence of a vast multitude assembled in the same county, Father Mathew impressively enforced respect for the laws, and denounced, in the strongest language, two atrocious murders perpetrated but a short time before, at Kileacle and the Silver-mines.

The perpetrators of these red-handed murders (said he) cannot escape the just anger of God. Though the brand of Cain on their brow may not be apparent to the eyes of mortals, to the eye of the Eternal it is as plain as the sun at noon is to us. Let them hide in the solitude of a cavern, or even in the bowels of the earth, or though

the waves of the sea rolled over them, the eye of Heaven pierces through every gloom, and marks out the wretch who has shed his brother's blood—who, with impious hands, has taken away the life of a fellow-creature. The murderer may escape the arm of man's justice; but so surely as he quits this world, and stands trembling before the judgement seat of God, so surely will he have to account to the Eternal Judge of the living and the dead, for the crime of which he was guilty in this life. Crimes such as these, my dear friends, bring a curse on the land. Oh, in the name of God! hold fast to the temperance pledge, and shun, as you would the plague, the company of those who would seek to entrap you into secret and illegal associations, which are the authors of every wickedness. Listen to the voice of your clergy, your faithful and devoted friends, and they will warn you against the wretches who go about, like roaring lions, seeking whom they may devour.

Father Mathew was too wise to condemn those who did not join the temperance society, or who enjoyed the use of wine and other stimulants in moderation. He employed every art to obtain followers and converts, but his advocacy was always within the bounds of reason and good sense. He thus expressed his opinion upon what was then a vexed question with the advocates of total abstinence:—

While I laud temperance, and call on all to join its ranks, far be it from me to pass censure on those who use strong liquors in a moderate way. I no more condemn them than did St. Paul condemn the state of honourable wedlock; but I say that every motive that could influence a Christian to adopt any line of conduct calls on us to warn others to abstain. There is no gratification worthy of a Christian that cannot be enjoyed without tasting intoxicating liquors.

But having thus defended himself from the imputation of holding an opinion or advocating a doctrine which would have a tendency rather to repel than to attract, he, in a few vigorous words, described the consequences, both temporal and eternal, which were brought about by habitual drunkenness:—

Oh! my friends, if our bridewell, our lunatic asylum, or our prisons, or even Hell itself, were to trace on our adorned walls the

history of the desolation, the agony, and the eternal ruin wrought by drunkenness, as did the mysterious hand upon the wall of the Court of the King, Balthazar, the reading of it would cause our hearts to die within us, and our spirits to faint away.

In his zeal for making 'converts,' no man ever surpassed Father Mathew. Neither age, nor sex, nor condition, was a protection against his seductive arts. The venerable grandfather in his arm-chair, or the toddler drawing his 'go-cart'—the master or the man, the mistress or the maid—the porter, the clerk, or the merchant—the policeman or the prisoner—the priest at the altar or the boy wearing the alb—the schoolmaster and the schoolmistress, or the scholar with the jacket and the scholar with the frock—the nurse in the hospital or the patient in the sick ward—the gentleman of wide estate or the lodge-keeper at his gate—the editor of the newspaper or the 'devil' besmirched with ink—the nobleman or the sweep—the fine lady or the street-scavenger—all were alike to Father Mathew, who never allowed slip an opportunity of adding a new follower to his standard.

'Did you see Father Mathew lately?' said one friend to another, whom he happened to meet travelling in the South of Ireland. 'I did,' was the reply. 'And I'll engage he made you take the pledge?' 'He did, indeed. But did you see him lately?' 'To be sure, I did.' 'And did he make you take it, too?' 'That he did.' 'There is no escaping him; but I am not sorry for it.' 'No, nor I, neither.'

Many a young fellow, who had as much notion of taking the pledge as he had of jumping over the moon, was caught, snaffled, bound hand and foot, before he knew where he was. 'My dear child, I know you wish to oblige me?' would be murmured in the softest and most winning accents of the practised entrapper of unsuspecting youth. This was one of his most deadly hooks, and seldom failed in its effect. 'Indeed, I would, Father Mathew—you *know* that, sir,' the intended victim would incautiously reply. 'Well, my dear, I

assure you, you would greatly oblige me if you would join our society, and give me the benefit of your influence.' 'But, Father Mathew, I assure you I have no occasion for it—I was never drunk in my life.' 'Of course you were not, my dear; and therefore it will be *no sacrifice to you*—you have nothing to give up, as others have; and you will enjoy the consciousness of having afforded a good example to others. My dear child, don't refuse me this favour.' And before the victim knew where he was, he found himself on his knees, repeating the words of the pledge; and on rising up, he was a Mathewite, enrolled in the ranks of temperance, with a silver medal hanging round his neck—the same medal which his captor had worn a moment before. Meet him in a coach or train; meet him in the street; visit him, or be visited by him; it was all the same—there was no escape, even for those who, to use their own words, 'did not require the pledge,' or 'had no occasion for it.' In flight alone was there protection from the wiles of one who was as well versed in the arts of the recruiting sergeant as in the duties and responsibilities of a chief and leader. Numbers of innocent boys and girls gladly did as he required of them, for the enjoyment of a holiday, or the possession of a picture-book or a doll; and if it were said that there was not much value in converts of this class, Father Mathew would reply, 'I prefer them to all others. Besides, they will be men and women one of those days. It is on the youth of the country I place my chief dependence.' And thousands of silver medals, and hundreds of thousands of the ordinary medals, did these young teetotallers cost him who valued their accession so highly.

For his young lady friends he had an appeal which was generally irresistible:—'Surely, my dear child, *you* cannot refuse to do glory to God? You know not what may be the salutary influence of your example in preserving poor weak creatures from misery and crime. To save others from temptation, is to do glory to God; and surely, my dear, *you*, who

were so religiously brought up, cannot refuse to do that.' Down on her knees went the young girl thus appealed to. And in this manner did the temperance leader swell the ranks of his society, and extend its influence amongst the educated and wealthy classes of the community.

'Once a teetotaller, for ever a teetotaller,' was Father Mathew's declaration and policy. No miser ever clutched his golden coin with a more eager grasp than did Father Mathew his teetotallers. It was with a positive sense of pain that he became conscious of the desertion or backsliding of a single follower. He mourned over the loss of a stray sheep, and never rested till he had followed it into the wilderness of temptation, and brought it back, and placed it safely in the fold. There was one infallible mode by which the good man's temper might at any moment be ruffled. That was by returning him the card and medal, thereby formally seceding from the society, and renouncing the practice of temperance. He could retain his composure against open attack or malignant imputation, and no human being ever so readily forgave his enemies as he did; but to lay down the medal, and tell him that you no longer intended to adhere to 'temperance'—which meant total abstinence—was an offence for which he had no patience, and scarcely any forgiveness.

A gentleman called on him one day, at his house in Cove Street, and no sooner did Father Mathew hear his well-known voice than he hurried down stairs to welcome him. 'My dear sir, I am delighted and proud to meet you, and glad to see you looking so well.' 'Indeed, Father Mathew, I am not at all so well as I appear to be,' replied his friend, in dolorous tones. 'I am very sorry to hear it, my dear sir; perhaps you work too hard?' 'I do, sir, work pretty hard; but it is not that that injures me; the fact is, Father Mathew, it's the—lemonade.' 'The lemonade, my dear!—what lemonade?' 'The lemonade, sir, that I drink after dinner,—it does n't agree with my stomach.' 'Well, my dear,

then don't drink it. You can have coffee instead; and good water is wholesomer than anything else.' It then appeared that the gentleman had come to resign his pledge; at which intelligence the grief of Father Mathew was excessive, for he dreaded the influence which this example might have on others. He entreated and implored 'his old and much-loved friend, whom he had known from childhood,' to take back his medal, and 'not abandon the good and holy cause;' but the much-loved friend was inexorable, explaining, at the same time, his conscientious belief that, from the peculiarly delicate nature of his constitution, and, in fact, intricate construction of his stomach, he required the mild stimulant of at least one tumbler of punch in the twenty-four hours. 'Then, sir, you may go and drink a bucket-full of it every day of your life,' said Father Mathew, losing all patience, and turning his back upon the victim of lemonade. For months after Father Mathew could not afford a civil word to the backslider, for his fall was as the fall of a tower; but the indignation died away in time, and the deserted leader could even laugh pleasantly at the sad effects of aerated beverages upon a delicate constitution.

The writer had dined and spent the evening with Father Mathew, and, at nine o'clock, was about leaving his house, being escorted to the door by his polite host; but just as he was bidding him adieu, there appeared in the door-way a great strapping fellow, more than six feet in stature. 'Let me see who this is,' said Father Mathew. 'Well, my dear, what is it you want?' said he to the countryman; 'perhaps you desire to take the pledge. If so, you will do a good work, and God will bless you for avoiding temptation. No good ever came from strong drink, my dear, either to body or soul.' The poor countryman seemed terribly embarrassed, and fumbled something between his fingers. 'Kneel down, my dear, and repeat the words of the pledge after me,' said the priest. 'Tis n't that I want, yer reverence—'tis to give

it up.' 'Give it up!—you surely do n't mean to break your solemn pledge, and to become a drunkard!' thundered the indignant temperance leader. 'No, yer reverence; but I'm not well in my health, and the docther says I'm better be after giving up the pledge—and here's the kard and middle.' Saying this, the countryman flung them both on the table in the little parlour, and made a rapid movement towards the door; but before he had reached the door, Father Mathew seized him by both shoulders, and treated him to a downright hearty shake, saying, 'Go away—go away—you great big booby! What a shame to think that a man of your size can't do without strong drink! Don't tell me of your doctors,—I know better,—you do n't want whisky or porter—I don't want them. Go, sir! you will be one day sorry for your foolishness.' And he shoved the recreant into the street, down which the poor fellow fled, as if the dogs of remorse were yelping at his heels.

There might sometimes be seen a flying pledge-breaker, pursued by one of the clerks or by a volunteer, rushing down Drinan Street,—which was immediately opposite the well-known dwelling in Cove Street,—or down Cove Street, and Father Mathew watching the chase from the window or the street door. It occasionally happened that a head was popped inside the parlour door, and that a clink of some hard substance on the floor followed the words,—'There 't is for ye—I'm done with it anyhow;' and a rush towards the street door would bear witness to the fact that an audacious deserter was about escaping, having, as it were, flung down his firelock before the face of his commander. Away the brave Donnelly would rush in pursuit, aided, perhaps, by some sturdy son of temperance who happened to be in the parlour at the time; and if the culprit were overtaken and captured, and Father Mathew in the way, speedy repentance and prompt pardon were the result; but it as frequently occurred that the plan of escape had been too well matured,

and that means had been taken to baffle pursuit, and prevent the possibility of capture. There was also a more simple and less perilous mode of giving up the pledge, which was largely availed of. This was by slipping the card or the medal under the hall door, or into the letter-box, or even sending it through the post-office; and to this safer mode of abandoning the cause, and 'taking to strong drink,' the dread of meeting Father Mathew, and encountering his anger, induced many to have recourse. But when, wretched and woe-begone, with tattered clothes and pale faces, the deserters returned after a week's debauch, there was no anger to dread,—they knew that compassion and tenderness were always awaiting the poor penitent prodigal. Truly, there was more joy in that parlour at the return of one drunkard than at the enrolment of ninety-nine sober, who had never fallen.

The original pledge did not contain a clause against 'cordials;' and, ere long, the evil of the omission was made apparent in a very injurious manner. A new trade sprang into existence, under the shadow and protection of the Temperance Society, and the practice of cordial drinking became but too general.

'Pat,' said a gentleman to his servant who was oscillating on his legs in a strange manner, 'you have been drinking. Why, the man *is* drunk!' 'Me drunk, sir! and I temperate these four years!' said Pat, in a wronged and reproachful tone. 'Well, if you *ar n't* drunk, I never saw a drunken man in my life,—that's all.' 'Sir, I'm temperate,' said Pat, who had at the same time to clutch the edge of the sideboard, to save himself from an upset. 'Tell me, Pat, my poor fellow, *what* have you been taking that *disagreed* with you so?' enquired his master, with an air of intense solicitude. 'Well, then, sir, I'll tell you no lie, 't is them cordials—the devil's cure to them for cordials!—indeed, I'm sure and certain there's poison in them, for I can't ketch a houl't of anything that it does n't slip out of my hand; and it gives me enough

to do to manage my legs, that's going under me, all the same as if I was a cripple. Bad luck to you for cordials!'

Now, poor Pat was the type of many others, who—though nothing could induce them to break the pledge, by taking the forbidden articles, whisky, porter, ale, or other 'strong drink'—freely indulged in what, after all, was much the same thing; for whisky was the base and chief ingredient of these 'cordials, fruit liquors, and the like,' against which Father Mathew now protested with all his energy. At a meeting near Blarney, in the year 1842, he referred to this too common practice of cordial drinking, and also to the medical dispensation in the original pledge—which, as his own statement proves, was liberally availed of by not a few of his followers:—

There is one subject which I must particularly call your attention to, and I caution you against making use of those snares of Satan, temperance cordials, for they cannot be manufactured or compounded without the aid of whisky of the worst description; and, as Colonel Titus said to Oliver Cromwell, 'Shall we who fought the lion (whisky and porter) allow ourselves to be devoured by the wolf?' I would sooner a man would break his pledge openly, for he then would be a base pledge-breaker; but a man who drinks those cordials is not only a base pledge-breaker, but also a hypocrite. There was a dispensation placed in the pledge, that the use of spirits would be allowed for medical purposes, but when I introduced that clause I had no idea that a man in perfect health would have a doctor's certificate in his pocket, and then consider himself authorised to take wine and punch at his dinner; but my intention was that he should bring his prescription to an apothecary or druggist, and anything he wished to give him he was perfectly welcome to take. I have now in my possession a certificate from a doctor, not forty miles from where we are at present, given to a pig-jobber, who could not do his business without a glass, and also another given to a carman, who wished to take a glass in the morning and another in the evening every day he went to Cork.

Thenceforward, Father Mathew might be heard announcing at the very top of his voice, and high above the heads of kneeling crowds, that the pledge included 'cider, cordials,

fruit liquors, and the like'—the latter comprehensive word being rather sung than spoken, and pronounced as if it were spelled 'loike.'

Relapses and backslidings were among the trials to which the temperance leader was subjected, and which, for the time, had a most depressing effect on a mind that, always sensitive, was occasionally sad. But he had his hours of consolation as well. Thus his heart rejoiced within him as he received accounts of the progress of temperance in distant parts of the world—in America or in India—or when he received invitations from Scotland and England, and also from the United States, expressed in the most flattering language, and giving glowing evidence of the spread and triumph of his beloved cause. The following letter from the Right Rev. Dr. Fennelly, Catholic Bishop of Madras, was one of that class of communications which were sure to have a cheering effect upon his mind :—

Catholic Cathedral, Madras :
November 22, 1842.

VERY REV. AND VERY DEAR FRIEND,—The little zeal I was supposed to entertain, while I was in the Island of Saints, for the prosperity of that great society for which the Almighty has raised you up, as an Apostle, was wafted to the coast of Coromandel, by a shorter and more expeditious way than the Cape of Good Hope, and long before my arrival was noised abroad in Madras. I was not well landed here, when a large party of Her Majesty's 57th Regiment, with the Rev. Mr. Gorman at their head, fell upon their knees before me, begging to be enrolled in Father Mathew's Society. I was pleased to find them fully acquainted with the nature and extent of the pledge, particularly when they informed me, that their minds were made up for several weeks to the perpetual abandonment of all intoxicating liquors. When I expressed a hope before sending them away, that they would never dishonour Father Mathew, one of them cried out, 'Of course we will be as good as our countrymen at home.' He was an Irishman.

The Catholic soldiers at Poonamalla and St. Thomas's Mount were not behind their brethren of Fort St. George, when opportunity offered to consecrate themselves to the same glorious cause of Temperance.

The good clergyman at St. Thomas's Mount, the Rev. C. Murphy (is not that a Cork name?) profited of the good example which was given him by the Rev. Mr. Gannon, and, to the great edification of his flock, he took the pledge likewise.

Nor was Father Mathew, humble and modest as he was, at all insensible to the eloquent praises of a well-written address, a gracefully-penned letter, or a happy speech. It was not his vanity that was flattered—it was his heart that was touched. Never was testimony so acceptable as when it did justice to his motives—for there were, alas ! too many who questioned their purity and disinterestedness, notwithstanding that he, with his own hand, had struck down the prosperity of his own family. Coming from those who differed from him in religious faith, these testimonies were still more acceptable to his harassed mind, which naturally sympathised with his jaded frame. Thus, for instance, writes Sir Francis Le Hunte, a Protestant gentleman :—

The body of Christians to which the revered father belongs may well praise God for having raised up among them such a man ; of him Ireland may well be proud ; but human love, quickened by love divine, knows no bounds ; properly speaking, *our dear Friend* belongs not *exclusively* to any party, to any country ; his sympathies are co-extensive with human joy and woe. All the kindreds and nations of the earth will claim Theobald Mathew as their own—all will equally love and revere him, for *his* love extends over all.

The letter from which the above is quoted was followed by an address, to both of which Father Mathew thus replies :—

My dear Sir Francis, your kindness has caused the full measure of obligation to overflow. I glory in being your fellow-labourer in this fruitful vineyard of the Lord, though only hired at the ninth hour. I would have sunk under the weight and heat of the day, were I not cheered on and invigorated by the soul-stirring address forwarded to me in the far south by you and my other generous Brother Teetotallers of Wexford.

Thackeray, who certainly is no hero-worshipper, bore a just and discriminating testimony to the character of Father

Mathew, whom he happily hit off in his 'Irish Sketch-Book.' The age of Father Mathew at the time he was sketched by the authority of 'Vanity Fair,' was not two-and-forty, as he supposed it was, but two-and-fifty. The difference was in the reality, not in the appearance; for he did not look a day older than the age then attributed to him.

On the day we arrived at Cork, and as the passengers descended from the 'drag,' a stout, handsome, honest-looking man, of some two-and-forty years, was passing by, and received a number of bows from the crowd around. It was Theobald Mathew, with whose face a thousand little print-shop windows had already rendered me familiar. He shook hands with the master of the carriage very cordially, and just as cordially with the master's coachman, a disciple of temperance, as at least half Ireland is at present. There is nothing remarkable in Mr. Mathew's manner, except that it is exceedingly simple, hearty, and manly, and that he does not wear the downcast, demure look, which, I know not why, certainly characterises the chief part of the gentlemen of his profession. He is almost the only man, too, that I have met in Ireland, who, in speaking of public matters, did not talk as a partisan. With the state of the country, of landlord, tenant, and peasantry, he seemed to be most curiously and intimately acquainted; speaking of their wants, differences, and the means of bettering them, with the minutest practical knowledge. And it was impossible, in hearing him, to know, but from previous acquaintance, whether he was Whig or Tory, Catholic or Protestant. His knowledge of the people is prodigious, and their confidence in him as great; and what a touching attachment that is which these poor fellows show to anyone who has their cause at heart, even to anyone who says he has! Avoiding all political questions, no man seems more eager than he for the practical improvement of this country. Leases and rents, farming improvements, reading societies, music societies, he was full of these; and of his schemes of temperance above all. He never misses a chance of making a convert, and has his hand ready and a pledge in his pocket for sick or poor. One of his disciples, in a livery-coat, came into the room with a tray: Mr. Mathew recognised him, and shook him by the hand directly; so he did with the strangers who were presented to him; and not with a courtly popularity-hunting air, but, as it seemed, from sheer hearty kindness and a desire to do everyone good. When breakfast was done (he took but one cup of tea, and says, that, from having been a great consumer of tea and

refreshing liquids before, a small cup of tea, and one glass of water at dinner, now serve him for his day's beverage) he took the ladies of our party to see his burying-ground, a new and handsome cemetery, lying a little way out of the town, and where, thank God! Protestants and Catholics may lie together without clergymen quarrelling over their coffins.

Invitations flowed in upon Father Mathew from various places in England and Scotland—from Catholic bishops, from temperance societies belonging to all sects, and also from private individuals of station and eminence. Early in the year 1842, he received a gratifying address from the ladies of Edinburgh, signed by 2,000 fair petitioners, who prayed him to commence his promised mission in Scotland in its capital. Invitations from many other places in Scotland were received likewise about the same time; to one of which—from Greenock—he replies:—

The only regret I feel is in consequence of the impossibility of my fixing at present a period for my journey to Scotland. It would afford me great pleasure to hasten the time; but I must first heal the deep and festering wounds of the Irish people.