

CHAPTER XVI.

Desires to keep free of Politics—O'Connell a Teetotaler—The Easter Procession of 1842—The Liberator and the Apostle—Tom Blewitt's Speech—The Stranger's Evidence—Characteristic Incident—Father Mathew's Considerateness.

TO keep the temperance cause free from the slightest connection with the politics of the day, was one of Father Mathew's most anxious desires; and we doubt if, among the many anxieties consequent upon his position, as the leader of a great movement, there was one which pressed so heavily upon him as that which he felt upon this head. To those who remember the period, from 1840 to 1845, it is well known that it was one of intense political excitement, when the public mind of Ireland was in a state of constant activity, and during which were held, in almost every part of the island, meetings and demonstrations unsurpassed in their magnitude and significance. Father Mathew had, on a hundred different occasions, proclaimed, and most truly, that his society was unsectarian and unpolitical, and that temperance had nothing whatever to do with polemics or politics; though he well knew, at the same time, that nearly the nine-tenths of those who had taken the pledge at his hands were Repealers, more or less advanced in their opinions, and that there was another man in Ireland who divided their admiration and affection with himself—and that that man was Daniel O'Connell. If Father Mathew were ever so much inclined to interfere with the political belief or action of his followers, he was too prudent to think of carrying his inclination into practice; for he could

not fail to be conscious of the fact that, however great and deserved was his influence, and however much he was loved and venerated by the mass of his countrymen, still, if he attempted to impose restraint or check upon their free action, they would have burst the bonds of allegiance to his moral leadership, and openly disregarded his admonitions, or even his commands. What he could do, in a matter so full of delicacy, and indeed of peril, he did—namely, to induce the members of the temperance reading-rooms to refrain from turning their rooms into political meeting places, and to withhold their bands, if possible, from being present at political gatherings. In the former, he very much succeeded; but with the bands his task was far more difficult, and much less successful. Father Mathew never supposed that a man was to relinquish his natural interest in politics merely because he relinquished strong drink, or that the fact of his wearing a medal was to change his whole nature. He was well aware that, in their homes, in their workshops, and in their rooms, his followers read other than temperance speeches; and that there were few, among those who received him at all times with such genuine demonstrations of respect and affection, whose blood was not stirred by the fiery accents of that great Tribune, whose voice was so often heard with delight by his countrymen.

Though taking no part whatever in politics, Father Mathew was still proud to know that his influence was felt in the political agitation of the day, and was thoroughly appreciated by O'Connell, for this reason—that enormous multitudes of people, who assembled at the call of the political leader, were held in perfect restraint by the controlling influence of the moral leader; and that many thousands of the full-grown population of Ireland met together, in various places and at different times, in all seasons and under all circumstances, and that no one instance of outrage or riot ever justified the interference of the watchful and jealous authorities.

Large bodies of men, young and old, came from long distances to the places of meeting, and returned to their homes and occupations with a peaceableness and good order that were among the most striking features of that wondrous political agitation, which seemed to rouse the whole manhood of at least three provinces of the kingdom. If O'Connell were enabled to keep in check an excitable and ardent people, whom he had inflamed to the highest point, by visions of future prosperity and happiness, of glory and grandeur to their country, as the result of that legislative independence which he assured them, and which he no doubt at the time believed, they could obtain—it was through the aid of Father Mathew that he did so; for though O'Connell might have successfully imposed total abstinence from all kinds of intoxicating drink upon his countrymen for a week, or for a month, as was done during the Clare Election, on which Catholic Emancipation mainly turned, it would have been impossible for him to have imposed it upon them for any considerable time. And had he to deal with a people liable to drunkenness, and therefore rife for disorder and tumult, he never could have guided his followers for so many years within the narrow paths of obedience to the law, respect for the sacredness of property, and undeviating adherence to the doctrine of 'moral force.' It was to Father Mathew that O'Connell was mainly indebted for the peace and good order which so signally marked those great gatherings, that inspired the apprehension of the Government of the day, and the wonder of those who regarded them with the interest or the curiosity of strangers. Independently, then, of the good which temperance conferred on the people in their individual capacity, and of the greater industry and higher morality which it promoted, O'Connell cherished it as a means to his own ends—the accomplishment of the object which required a thoroughly obedient and docile people to lead. And only in a country elevated and purified by Father Mathew's preach-

ing, could the political tribune have found that thoroughly obedient and docile people. Hence O'Connell aided, so far as he could, the moral movement of the day.

That O'Connell was impressed, even at an early period, with the gravity of the movement, and the hold which temperance had taken upon the minds of his countrymen, we have an interesting evidence in the fifth volume of Guizot's 'History of My Times.' At a dinner party at the house of Mr. and Mrs. Stanley (now Lord and Lady Stanley of Alderly) on the 8th of April 1840, the French Statesman met the Irish Tribune; whose conversation he thus records:—

He spoke much; he detailed the progress of temperance in Ireland; the drunkards were disappearing by thousands—the taste for regular habits and more refined manners advanced in proportion as inebriety receded. No one expressed the slightest doubt. I asked him whether this was a mere puff of popular humour, or a lasting reform! He replied gravely, 'It will last; we are a persevering race, as all are who have suffered much.' He took pleasure in addressing himself to me—in calling me to witness the improved fortune of his country, and his personal triumph. I retired towards midnight, and was the first to go, leaving Mr. O'Connell surrounded by four cabinet ministers and five or six ladies of rank, who listened to him with a mixture, somewhat comic, of curiosity and pride, of deference and disdain.

O'Connell was really sincere in his advocacy of temperance; and the best proof of this sincerity is the fact that, for a considerable time, he gave up altogether the use of wine, which he had enjoyed in moderation. And it was not until he had been ordered by his medical advisers to resume his former practice of using wine, as a stimulant necessary in his case, that he did so.

Perhaps O'Connell thought he was conferring a signal favour on Father Mathew, when he publicly announced, at the usual weekly meeting in Conciliation Hall, in Dublin, that on the following Monday—Easter Monday, the 28th of March 1842—he was to join the temperance procession which was to take place in Cork on that day. But Father Mathew, though

he may have regarded the visit of the Lord Mayor of Dublin as a compliment, certainly did not look on it in the light of a favour; and if he could have prevented the announcement of the visit by any sacrifice on his part, he would willingly have made that sacrifice, and simply for this reason—that he was honestly sincere in his desire to keep the temperance movement free from the least connection with politics, and that he felt that O'Connell's presence on such an occasion, and in so marked and conspicuous a manner, would seriously compromise his personal reputation, and injure the cause in certain quarters from which he had received valuable countenance, and even practical assistance. If Father Mathew could, by any possibility, or on any pretence, have adjourned the procession, or got rid of it altogether, he certainly would have done so; but Easter Monday was the day specially devoted to such demonstrations, and the temperance societies, throughout an extensive district of the country, had already made their preparations for taking part in it. There was no help for it now, and therefore the best thing to be done was to put a good face on the matter; which he accordingly did.

Whatever the feelings with which Father Mathew received the announcement of O'Connell's intended presence on Easter Monday, the delight of the people was excessive: they thought only of the pleasure of beholding their beloved 'Liberator' on an occasion so full of joy and exultation. The idea of seeing the two men whom they most loved and admired walking together in the same procession, gratified their attachment to their political leader, who had emancipated their altars, and to their moral leader, who had brought happiness to their homes. Great then was the joy which the announcement of O'Connell's intended visit spread through the now blended ranks of Temperance and Repeal.

O'Connell arrived in Cork on Saturday the 26th of March, and, on the following morning, he edified the congregation of the church in which he performed his devotions, by his

fervour and piety; for O'Connell was profoundly attached to his faith, and complied with its solemn obligations with the most devout reverence.

The great event of the following day was described the same evening in a local newspaper; and as the sketch was written at the moment, it will now—twenty-one years after—afford the reader a more vivid picture of what a temperance procession was in those days, than any description which memory could supply. We omit a long list of the different societies, with local descriptions and allusions, which could not be understood by the general reader; and it is only necessary to say that the societies, 57 in number, were accompanied by 41 bands, and that the strength of these societies ranged from 50 members, the lowest, to 700 members, the highest. The average number was from 150 to 200—making, on the whole, about 10,000 persons actually walking in procession. With this statement, we shall allow the writer of the following sketch* to describe one of the most remarkable, and certainly one of the most memorable, of the temperance demonstrations of that period:—

From an early hour in the morning, which was rather threatening and inclined to rain, the city was thronged with numberless groups of people, either anxious to behold the anticipated spectacle, or about to fall in with the several societies that were to walk on the occasion. Every road, street, lane, and avenue, leading into Cork, echoed to the sound of music, as hundreds and thousands poured in from neighbouring towns and districts of the country, or even from places so far distant as thirty or forty miles. Long before the time appointed for starting, the vast area of the Corn Market was densely crowded with various societies, each headed by its band of twenty or even thirty musicians, the members dressed, with scarfs, blue, pink, or green, of Irish manufacture, and holding a long white wand decorated with coloured ribbons or laurel. Before the several societies was borne a flag or banner, generally with the name of the particular room to which they belonged; some having painted on them an appropriate

* From the *Cork Examiner* of the same day.

device, or allegorical representation, and, in many cases, a full-length figure of the Apostle himself.

At the hour of eleven, the procession began to move slowly from the Corn Market, over Anglesea bridge, down the South Mall, along the Parade, and up Great George Street, the Western Road, and so through the entire rout settled on some weeks previously. When they had proceeded as far as the County Club-House, they were met by the Lord Mayor of Dublin, who came to join Father Mathew. Their greeting was warm and affectionate.

The scene which followed, it might be possible to imagine, but is certainly impossible to describe. Who could tell of the wild joyous shout that rent the very air as the two great men of Ireland, the political and the moral emancipators of her people, met together! The eagerness—the exclamations of delight—the rushings forward to snatch a look at both—the rapture and enthusiasm of that moment—are beyond our poor powers of description. In a short time after, Thomas Lyons, our own Mayor, accompanied by several respectable gentlemen and merchants, joined the procession. Another shout welcomed his arrival. Father Mathew then walked, with the Lord Mayor on one side, and the Mayor of Cork on the other. Every window was crowded with brilliant groups of fashionably-dressed ladies, who waved their handkerchiefs as the splendid array filed before them. Every roof, hall-door, balcony, balustrade, wall, and projection was literally covered with a mass of eager and delighted beings, who cheered with all their might as the Liberator or Apostle came in view. As the procession was passing the house of Dr. Bullen, on the South Mall, in a window of which sat the Right Reverend Doctor Murphy, the leaders halted, whereupon every man raised his hat, in respect for our venerable and beloved Bishop, while loud and continued cheers echoed from ten thousand voices. His lordship, who seemed visibly affected at this testimony of affectionate respect, blessed the thousands before him, and bowed with an appearance of great feeling. No language can at all do justice to the tremendous crowd of people, who did not form part of the regular army, but who lined the streets on both sides, and who required all the exertions of the vigorous stewards to keep them from breaking the line of march. In whatever street there was a temperance reading-room, there was an arch of green boughs spanning its breadth from house to house. Banners, emblems, garlands of flowers, paintings of various kinds, busts of Father Mathew, and allegorical devices, decorated the walls and windows of the several rooms before which the procession passed.

The Lord Mayor separated from the procession at the end of Lancaster Quay, when he knelt down and received the blessing of Father Mathew amidst the rapturous cheerings of the countless spectators. His lordship then departed in company with the Mayor of Cork.

After marching through the various streets marked out by the arranging committee, the vast body of people arrived at the terminus, the Corn Market, about three o'clock, when, after having cheered several times, they quietly separated with the most admirable order.

Thus terminated the demonstration which inspired Father Mathew with so much anxiety; but his labours might be said to have commenced with its termination—for during the remainder of the day, and until an advanced period of the night, he was unceasingly at work, administering the pledge—vast numbers of people, from the country as well as belonging to the city, having been influenced to join the society, as much through the excitement of the day, as by the practical lesson taught in the good clothes, healthy appearance, and happy countenances of those who walked in the procession.

The pride and exultation of the teetotallers themselves will be best expressed in the words of a working man, a prominent member of one of the most famous temperance rooms of the city. The excellent man who spoke these words at a meeting held in the Globe Lane Room on the same night, is now no more; but, so long as he lived, he continued to be a staunch supporter of the cause, from which he derived much personal benefit and no little fame—for Tom Blewitt was a welcome guest at every 'festival' held in Cork. On this occasion he was dressed in the handsome uniform of the band of the room of which he was a member. It may be mentioned that, among the bands that accompanied the procession of the day, there were several that wore really handsome uniforms—some, like that of the Globe Lane Room, purely military—others fanciful, with national colours or devices. Many a senator in St. Stephen's would be happy to possess Tom Blewitt's facility of speaking, and that, too, at a moment's notice, and without the possibility of preparation. It was thus that the

working shoemaker of Cork responded to the call of the chairman :—

My dear friends, I will not trespass on your time by making excuses about inability, but will at once say, that I never felt so proud in my life as I do at this moment. I feel proud when I recollect the splendid spectacle of this day—I feel proud of my present companions, and I feel proud when I think that I have been one of the humblest instruments of raising my fallen country to that proud position intended for her by nature and by nature's God. Is there anyone, I ask, who possesses a spark of true feeling, who thinks with the mind of an Irishman, or a Catholic, that will not lend his every energy to advance this cause, until all Ireland shall stand up in the ranks of regeneration? I hope that the pride which animates me this evening, will continue to animate me until the close of my earthly existence. On the hill which overlooks the City Jail, a trifling delay caused the procession to halt. I looked over the dark and massive walls of that prison, and then gazed on the countless thousands who filed beneath me in grand array, and I thought if it had not been for Father Mathew, and the noble work of his hands, how many of those whom I then saw before me in happiness, in virtue, and independence, would be solitary mourners in the cells of that period! I thought how many deserted wives and children would crowd around its door, weeping in bitterness and despair. I reflected, that were it not for temperance, how many would have been guilty inmates of its dungeons—how many would have rattled the convict's chain, or fallen bleeding victims to the offended laws of their country. I thought this, and I asked myself—was there man, woman, or child, who would put forth a hand to check this great work, that will eventually lessen the inmates of the prison and the work-house, banish the convict hulks, and close up our penal settlements? My friends, if you see such a person, mark him as an enemy to his country and his kind—one who, like a second Nero, would stab the womb that gave him birth!

On the following evening an interesting meeting took place, at which Father Mathew was present. It was held in the Church Street Room, on the occasion of a number of emigrants—240 in all—being entertained previous to their departure for New Brunswick, in the ship 'Clyde.' Father Mathew was surrounded, as he frequently was, by many of

the leading citizens, and supported by his most zealous and eloquent assistants. Whether it was from weariness, or the necessity for reserve, he appeared reluctant to speak; and in answer to his own name, which was mentioned in glowing terms, and received with more than ordinary enthusiasm, he said but a few words, which are given principally to show how he had been employed during the whole of that day :—

It was unnecessary for him to allude to the encomiums that had been made; he knew that they had drawn them from their own hearts, pure and unrestrained. There were many there who had witnessed the progress of the temperance cause, from the time he had planted the grain of mustard seed, until it had grown into the mighty tree under which so many thousands had found repose. But if he alluded to the progress of the cause, he was so identified with it that anything he might say might be considered egotism. He would leave it then to other persons. He did not lay any claim to eloquence, nor had he had time to write a speech, for since half-past six o'clock that morning he had been occupied in administering the pledge, and whatever pleasure they might have enjoyed from listening to a prepared speech from him, he was certain that they would be better pleased to know that he had been so occupied.

William Martin came out with peculiar force on that occasion, and added the camel to his list of illustrious water-drinkers, which already included the race-horse, the lion, and the elephant. He again alluded to the feeling of personal relief which he experienced in April 1838, when he felt the load of the temperance cause lifted from off his shoulders and placed on those of 'his friend the Apostle'—for William, sober Quaker as he was, fell into the habit of the day, and called Father Mathew 'the Apostle,' just as others did. William declared that there was not a circumstance which happened on the previous day that could offend the most fastidious.

As a matter of course, the health of Captain PENTREATH, of the good ship 'Clyde,' was pledged in flowing cups—of tea; and his speech, short and sailor-like, is valuable as the testimony of a disinterested and unprejudiced witness :—

He could not (he said) allow himself to be seated without offering his opinion on the temperance movement. He came to the port of Cork, after being four years absent from it, and was not prepared to meet the change that had taken place. On coming into the harbour, he was boarded by a pilot, whom he invited to dinner; during the dinner, he asked him to take a drink of ale, but he said, 'he could not, for he was a teetotal man, and one of Mr. Mathew's society.' He (the captain) asked him was it possible that a Cork pilot could be a Mathewite? and he was told by the pilot that he was one, and for fifty guineas he would not drink ale. Next came the boatmen, who said, they would take me in for such and such a sum; and how different was their manner then, compared with when they used to drink the calamity water! It was a pleasure to come into the port of Cork under the present circumstances. On his landing he was not prepared to witness the sight he did witness; for though he had been in the five quarters of the world, he never witnessed anything of such importance as the procession of the previous day.

That procession was a costly one to Father Mathew. A considerable number of the societies and bands had come distances of 20, of 30, and even of 40 miles. As many as 700 people had walked in from Kinsale. Large numbers had also come from Dunmanway, from Millstreet, and from Mitchelstown. Now these people were almost exclusively of the class that lived by the labour of their hands; and the very effort which they made to dress for such an occasion, and to prepare for such a journey, was a severe drain upon their scanty resources. Humanity as well as policy would have suggested to any one in Father Mathew's position, that some consideration should be shown to these poor people; but the prompting of his own generous and thoughtful nature impelled him to a liberality towards them which might be truly termed munificent, but which, by those who did not thoroughly understand the man or appreciate his position, was designated as foolish and wanton extravagance. The temperance leader had in him much of the spirit of the knights of old. To him, as to them, money was the least of the goods of life; and no conqueror in the tournament ever scattered largess

so profusely among the applauding commonalty as Father Mathew scattered silver and gold among his humble followers. Thus it was that these temperance demonstrations, which indicated the progress and the triumph of the cause, formed a serious item in his expenditure, and a heavy drain upon his exchequer.

It was about this time that the following rather strange incident occurred. Father Mathew had been invited to preach for some charity, and afterwards administer the pledge, in a certain locality. A gentleman residing in the neighbourhood, whose name has probably been since heard of in the Court of Encumbered Estates, invited him to his place, where he treated him with that hospitality and distinction which were alike honouring to the host and the guest. Father Mathew was to sleep at this gentleman's house, and to be driven next day in his carriage to the place of meeting. At the appointed time, on the following day, the carriage was at the door; and having taken his leave of the ladies of the family, he set out, in company with his host. The two gentlemen passed the time agreeably, as the well-appointed carriage rolled smoothly along, drawn by a pair of fine and spirited horses. They had arrived within a mile or so of the appointed place, when there was a sudden stop. Father Mathew at once looked out, and saw two or three rather poor-looking men, one of them as if holding the horses' heads, and the others at the side of the carriage. Believing them to be enthusiastic followers, who desired to anticipate his arrival by coming to meet him on the road, or poor fellows who wished to take the pledge thus early, in order perhaps to make no delay in the village, he opened the door of the carriage, and leaned out eagerly towards them, saying—'Good morrow, boys! Glad to see you. I hope we shall have a fine meeting. You wish to take the pledge?' 'No, yer reverence,' said a

cunning-looking little man, with a peculiarly sharp eye, scratching the side of his head with an air of comical perplexity; 'we arn't going to be after taking the pledge now, an' I'm temperate myself these three year; 'tis on another little business we've come.' 'I am delighted to meet a faithful teetotaller like you, my dear. And can I do anything for you or for your friends?' 'We're much obligated to yer reverence, and a fine warrant you are to be good an' kind; but 'tis with the masther there we've a word to say,'—and he indicated the owner of the hospitable mansion, and the occupant of the luxurious carriage, with a nod of his head, and a significant shrug of the shoulders. 'Oh! I beg your pardon, my dear sir,' said Father Mathew, drawing back, so as not to prevent free communication between his travelling companion and his tenants, or workmen, as he supposed the three men to be. But, to his horror, he found that the cunning-looking little man was a bailiff, who had a writ to serve on his hospitable friend, and who was then and there about taking possession of his carriage and horses. The dismay and confusion of the unhappy gentleman, at this unlucky mischance, might possibly be imagined, but certainly could not be described; but the embarrassment and annoyance of Father Mathew, at witnessing the humiliation of a friend, was still greater. The amount, though not very large, was utterly beyond the capability of the gentleman to meet, at least on that occasion; but Father Mathew pressed his hand softly on the arm of his companion, saying, 'My dear sir, pardon the liberty I am going to take with you. Do allow me the gratification of relieving you from this annoyance.' And having ascertained the amount, he at once settled the debt, and added a *douceur* to the bailiff, such as, were he not a staunch teetotaller, 'for three year an' more,' would have afforded him the means of enjoying a protracted 'bat-

ther,' as the man of law technically termed a systematic debauch, or drinking-bout. Away rolled the liberated carriage, while Father Mathew employed every kindly art to soothe the feelings of his humiliated friend, and to distract his mind from dwelling on a circumstance so peculiarly unpleasant.