

## CHAPTER XXI.

Return to Cork—The Mathew Tower—Mr. O'Connor's Motives for its Erection—Again in Harness—His Visitors—Midnight Labour—His Correspondents—Strange Epistles.

GREAT was the joy in Cork at the return of Father Mathew from England. It was his first prolonged absence from his own country, and the deepest interest had been excited and kept alive, in the minds of his friends\* and followers, by the varied events of his triumphant English tour. For a week after his arrival the parlour in Cove Street was crammed almost to suffocation, from morning

\* To the impression made upon the mind of his personal friend, the late Mr. William O'Connor, merchant tailor, of Cork, by the reception given to Father Mathew in London, are the lovers of the picturesque indebted for the erection of the Mathew Tower, which forms so striking an object, from its lofty sight on the hill-side, on the Glanmire bank of the Lee. The foundation-stone was laid on the 30th of October, 1843; and at the fête with which its completion was celebrated, its spirited founder explained the motives which impelled him to an act of such signal munificence. He said:—

'I have not the least regret for the motives which actuated me in building this edifice; for though many said it was an expensive undertaking, yet with the same views I then and still entertain, I would not consider ten times the expense misapplied for such a purpose; and if I could raise the tower to ten times its present height, it would still be unequal to the dignity and moral grandeur of the services of him of whose labours it is commemorative. A greater impression was never made on an individual than upon me, at witnessing the kindly reception Father Mathew met with from all classes of society in London, and I resolved, on my return to Ireland, to commemorate it in some manner; and soon afterwards, when walking over the grounds you are now on, it struck me that the site would be a most eligible one to build a tower on, which would perpetuate Father Mathew's fame, and, at the same time, signify my gratitude for the reception he had met with in London: and I feel assured that it is only necessary that the people of both countries should know each other better and more intimately, to create more kindly feelings between both.'

to night. There were straying sheep to be taken back into the fold, prodigals to be welcomed and forgiven, backsliders to be pardoned; there were petitions to be presented, disputes to be settled, difficulties to be smoothed down; there were deputations to be received, and applications to be answered; there were whispered communications to be made in the corner of the little room, by some poor creature who had counted, with trembling eagerness, every day and hour till the good man's return; and there were interviews to be held at the foot of the stairs, or in the sitting-room. And amidst all this bustle and excitement, Father Mathew was in his element, having a word for every one, and an ear for all. He would break through the recital of some complicated tale of a misunderstanding between the leading members of a favourite reading-room, to receive a tattered drunkard, in whose tangled locks, pale cheeks, blood-shot eyes, and trembling limbs, a useful lesson might be read. Others might have shrunk from contact with that poor degraded human being, but not Father Mathew, who would exclaim, in a cheery voice, 'Welcome, my dear!—welcome!—it is never too late to do a good work. We never should despair of the mercy of the Lord. God help you, my poor child; you have been too long the slave of strong drink—it is time for you to rise up against your greatest enemy. Kneel down, my dear, and pray of God to give you grace and strength to keep the promise you are about to make.' No sooner was the poor fellow sent away happy, perhaps with half-a-crown slipped into his hand, than Father Mathew would again plunge into the complicated perplexity of the misunderstanding. Arriving rapidly at the real merits of the question, he would offer a few words of earnest advice, or, if necessary, interpose his authority; but his usual plan, when the statement was *ex parte*, was to appoint a time when both sides were to be heard. He would then turn to a 'batch,' which had been forming in the interval; and after

having administered the pledge, spoken a kind word to each, heard the whispered tale of some who were more wretched-looking than the others, and ordered medals to be given to the children, he would receive an address from a local society, and reply to its splendid hyperbole and magnificent metaphors in a manner which would flush the earnest faces of his followers with proud happiness—which reply was certain to be repeated to the assembled members, on the same evening, by the deputation, without the loss of a single word. Then would come an appeal for a personal interview of 'only half a minute.' This would be acceded to unflinchingly, and soon Father Mathew's hand might be seen to dive into that deep pocket of his, and then brought into contact with the hand of the person to whom he was speaking; and then there might be heard a deep murmur of thanks, mingled with prayers, as the person retired rapidly, and with a much relieved air. Father Mathew would then go to the hall door—which, as a matter of course, was always open—to see and speak with some peculiarly cherished beggar, whom, perhaps, the rest of the community regarded as a confirmed impostor; and having made that fellow-creature happy for the day, he would return to the parlour, to receive another deputation, patch up a difference, accept an invitation, or give or promise aid towards the formation of a new temperance band, which, according to the solemn assurance of the spokesman, was essential to the social and moral salvation of the district.

Just as the salvation of the district had been satisfactorily secured, at the expense of Father Mathew's pocket, a strange voice might be heard at the door, enquiring, 'Is it here Mr. Mathew resides?' and a more familiar voice replying, 'If ye mane does his reverence Father Mathew live here, this is his house, sure enough, and God bless him every day he rises.' This was an English or American stranger who had come to pay a passing visit to the Apostle of Temperance;

but whether the stranger came with or without an introduction, he was always certain of receiving a cordial welcome from Father Mathew, whom the world's applause had not robbed of his genial and unaffected manner. The stranger would perhaps venture into the parlour, glance curiously at the groups around, examine the pages of the register, read over the last name recorded, with its corresponding number, and remain for a short time, till he had witnessed the administration of the pledge; then he would accompany the master of the mansion to his grand reception room, which was as simple in its appointments as the cell of a monk. The interview, however brief, would be sufficient to impress the stranger with the shrewdness, sagacity, and worldly knowledge of a man whom he had most probably regarded as an enthusiast—something between a Howard and a Peter the Hermit.

But just as some new topic had been started, Father Mathew, who, from the window, which commanded the opposite street, had seen a critical case approaching, would apologise for his momentary absence, and, rushing down stairs, arrive at the door in time to hail the arrival, and secure the prize before there was an opportunity or possibility of escape.

There were visits to be paid, cases to be hunted up, obdurate sinners to be pounced upon unexpectedly; there were friends and strangers to be entertained at dinner; there were temperance rooms to be called in upon; there were leaders in the cause to be consulted or advised with.

But with these various engagements the duties and labours of the day did not terminate. There was the heaviest task of all to be still undertaken—there was the correspondence to be read, and to be replied to. And what a pile of letters had accumulated during his absence in England! Why here was work for half a dozen active secretaries. Letters from India—letters from America—letters from England and

Scotland—letters from all parts of Ireland—letters from every class of society, and on almost every imaginable subject. Here was a communication concerning the interests of his order, from the superior of an Irish house, or a high official in Rome; next, was a document with an enclosure—the document, a letter giving sundry cogent reasons why the writer relapsed to whisky-punch—the enclosure, the surrendered temperance card of the logical seceder. Next came an anonymous production, in which Father Mathew was affectionately besought to abandon his sinful Church, and to lead a new Reformation. Then a letter full of praise and congratulation from some English nobleman, who expressed his regret that the illustrious Apostle of Temperance had not honoured his house by his presence. Then a letter from a female writer, imploring his prayers for the object which she specified; and one from a more impetuous and imperative correspondent, who insisted on obtaining his blessing ‘by return of post.’ Here was a land agent, soliciting his influence with an overholding tenant, to induce him to give up a dwelling peaceably; and here a coaxing missive from a poor fellow, who found the temperance martingale too tight for his virtue, and who was satisfied to remain a devoted and enthusiastic follower of the cause till the day of his death, if he would only be allowed an occasional ‘dandy’ for the sake of his delicate stomach, and a moderate allowance of ale or porter wherewith to supply exhausted nature.

That the reader may see there is no exaggeration in this description, or rather indication, of the varied character of the correspondence to which, spent and wearied by a long day of incessant exertion, Father Mathew had to devote his attention during the hours of night, when all around him were enjoying their natural repose, a few extracts and letters are given, as a sample of the rest.

Here, for instance, was a letter that clearly admitted of no delay in reply. It bore a number of signatures, and was

written in a style at once grand and forcible. It complained of some individual who had ‘the *avaricious audacity*’ to withhold, and still retain, ‘the 10*l.* given by your reverence for instruments for our band;’ and it thus concluded:—

But the motto of Horace suits this person, we think, admirably—that is—*semper avarus eget*. The question now is, shall we get our instruments, or shall we not? shall we continue a Temperance Band, or shall we not? shall we, must we (*after all*) be *driven to give up our pledges*, or shall we continue Temperate, or not? On your reply in the affirmative we still have reliance.

The reader may not clearly comprehend the connection between the 10*l.* and the pledge, or between the band and sobriety, but Father Mathew did; and the answer was of course a second donation, but not forwarded through the medium of the party whose ‘avaricious audacity’ was the occasion of the correspondence.

His immediate attention was called, in the next, to a tremendous feud raging between two societies, which preferred equal claims to his acceptance of an invitation to their respective rooms. But, unhappily for the innocent advocate of one of the rivals, and for the cause he pleaded, he added this fatal postscript, which he believed to be a clincher:—‘And, your reverence, the Society must not omit to tell you, that their band amuse the people by their music on every occasion, and played *Mr. O’Connell into town when he had his Repeal meeting here.*’

Here is the joint production of man and wife, two servants, who evidently had a desire to fall into temptation with a free conscience, and whose plea for release is plausibly urged. It is given exactly as it was written:—

Dublin July 23.

REVD SIR—I beg leave to inform you that this is the second time I have wrote to you on this occasion an has Got no answer which makes my mind very aneasey it is in consequence of me and me wife taking the pledge from your Reverence for a few months Mereley to induce

two friends of ours to take it as the were living a very unhappy life all from drink an as the would not take the pledge unless we did we a greed to do so but neither Me or me wife never had any occasion to do so only on their account as we always lived very temperate an never took any drink to injure us Eather soul or body and as our friends is living a very hapy life Ever since Both me an me wife is determined to give up our pledge but would not wish to do so till we would acquaint your Reverence and as I mentioned in the other letter that I sent to your Rev about a month agoe that it is not in Regard of drink But we feel a dread on our minds that we never felt before which makes us very aneasay an as we are both Servants an going from one place to another to earn our bread there is Great temptations Every where we goe it is for me wife she has confined herself to the house Ever since afraid of Going into any society lest any thing might attempt her She is not near so well in health as She was before an whether it is that is the occasion of it or not we cannot say but she thinks it is as her mind is very aneasay But if we thought that it would make such an Impression on our minds as it has done or that there was any diffeuty in Giving it up we would never have taken it but as your Rev Said in the Royal Ecchange that any person after two or three months was at their own free will to Give it up if the wished So on them terms we took it for our friends Sake it is now better than three months an as we have made up our minds to give it up we beg of you in honor of God to leave us your Blessing we Remain Most Revd Sir your very obt an humble Servants Mary an Abraham \* \* \* \*

at Mr \* \* \* \*  
Carlisle Buildings dublin

we wait most anxciuous for your Revnce answer before we Give it up

The following is thus comprehensively addressed :—

To

The very revd. theobald  
town  
Mathew of Cork or elsewhere.

The writer is evidently bent on the recovery of his freedom, and resolves to be free, whether Father Mathew should give him permission or not ; still a liberative line from his reverence would be a triumph over the less formal deserters, who

turned their back upon their flag, and did not lay down their arms and surrender their commission with dignity, as this Wexford man desired to do :—

April 20th.

REVEREND SIR—I write these few lines to you hoping to find you in good As this leaves me at present thanks be to god for it, Dear Sir I Wrote these few lines to you hoping that your reverence Would be so kind as to take the pledge from me, As i Would wish to give it up, Dear Sir it is not to become a Drunkard that i am going to give it up but as temtation is so great and that the greater part of people that has taken the pledge is after brak through it and i Would Not Wish to break the pledge that way Without geting liberty to do so and i hope that your reverence Will be so kind as to take the pledge from me, and if you dont i Will break it, for my part I did Not want a pledge at all for i never was a drunkard at all Nor i Wont take any more glass of Sperrits or a pint of beer, so reverend sir i hope you will be So Kind as to grant me my request.

Dear Sir I Would be very glad that you Would Write me a few lines to let me know What you would do about it if it was not to much trouble for, and if you write derict your letter to James \* \* \* \*  
Taghmon Co Wexford

So i remain your most obegant and humble Servant James \* \* \* \*

Here is a very different kind of letter, which painfully illustrates those unhappy cases in which the husband or the wife, the father or the mother, implored the interference of Father Mathew :—

VERY REV. DEAR SIR—With grief and sorrow I address you. My poor wife has ruined herself and me, and nearly brought disgrace on our darling children by the unfortunate habit of drinking. It has gone on for a long time, and shame compelled me to keep it secret; but it would be a crime to let it rest longer. She promised me this morning she would take the total abstinence pledge, but would not be induced to go over to you; in fact, she is not able, she has brought herself to death's door with it. She has not been out of bed since Saturday last till this morning. You never did a greater act of charity than to call on her. She promised me she would tell you all.

Very respectfully and gratefully,

The prescription in the following elaborate appeal to Father Mathew's finer feelings is too valuable to be lost. It will be seen, however, that the patient who may be inclined to adopt the prescription should take his medicine in a pious state of mind, as otherwise its efficacy might possibly be neutralised :—

Ballyhooly, May ye 2nd.

VERY REVD. FATHER—Its with much pleasure I have to announce to you, that I am a Loyal member of Yr. Society, now, nearly Six Years. And During that time I not only kept from any kind Spirituous liquors, but in one of the Visits Yr. Very Revd. person, paid one of my Neighbouring Villages, I renewed my Pledge Against Any of the other Stuffs that I frequently Saw teetotallers make use of, Such as Soda, Peppermt. Ginger ale, cordial, lemonade, &c. &c., and all such things. I Entirely avoided them one, and all. I happened last winter, through Excessive labour, to Get a very heavy fit of Sickness, which both Emaciated, And Debilitated me, Very much. I had as good Nourishmt. as Any Poor man in my Sphere of life, could have, And all was not serving me. I was ordered by a friendly Neighbour of mine, to Drink, a large tumbler of Punch, that would be hot, Strong, and Sweet, with a large lump of Butter melted on it, and take it sitting in my bed, before I'd Settle myself to Sleep, this was, in order to remove the Pains out of my bones, which at the Same time, I was very bad with, then, tho bad I was, I did not do it until I'd See more about it. I got a Stick, And walked with its help, down to my Priests House, (for I considered leave was very light,) and told him all as I have here stated, And what he told me, was, to drink Some whey, that it was Very Good; and that I, at that hour of the Night, or Even Season of the Year, had no more Getting of whey, nor anything to make whey of, than I had of Spanish wine, in the miserable Street of Ballyhooly, or its Vicinity. I then returned home, Not pleased at my Disappointment. he feared, I suppose, that I'd return to drink again at my Six Years end, like a Dog to his Vomit, but I do assure both him and You, that I'd do no such thing, but Sir, when I came back from my Priest, I acted my own Physician, I sent for a Noggin of Spirits, made punch of it, mixed my butter with it, And Drank it off, in God's name. And whether it was occasioned by I being in the latter end of my fit, or the Drinking of the punch I know not, but thank God, I slept that night very sound, perspired much, and was relieved next morning. And Since, this is a clear and true confession.

Now Sir, I took my pledge, July 19th 1839, And at that time, the No. was 14,449. And my name is John O' \* \* \* \*. All this you'll find in Yr. Book. Now, in consequence of age, hard labour, & fatigue and Dejection of Spirits, I'd want Some additional nourishmt. and I trust on this application Yr. revce. will be pleased to allow me Some two or three, Pints Glasses, tumblers, or Dandies, (not Cider) And I'll continue temperate, but not a teetotaller, otherwise if you dont comply with this request, I'll Decently convey the tokens to Cork, but I'll never Drink, without your Permission, while I have them, I Expect an Affirmative answr. to this, by return of Post, I remain with Every Possible mark of respect, And with all the ceremony of complemt. Yr rev<sup>ces</sup>. Very Obedt. Humble Servt., a teetotaller yet,

John O' \* \* \* \*

The following is a strange epistle, and is given literally as it was written :—

REEVD SIR,—I beg you will Look on a Foolish and Almost insane young Man the only thing I Reqeire from yoor Revde is a an Enterview for 10 Minutes as I dred Suciede and that I shall Get yoor blessing to Protect or if not I Fear I will Full Fill the words of the Scriptor that is to Say that I Shall Die as I have Lived For the Last 3 Months

I am obed yooors

Veery Humble Patrick \* \* \* \*

Here is a joint resignation, most formally worded :—

Wexford, August 10.

REVD. SIR,—As our business requires us to take a little spirits occasionally we have come to the resolution of giving up the pledge—yours most respectfully

Nicholas \* \* \* \* and

Pat \* \* \* \*

PS Please send an answer by return of Post to Mr. \* \* \* \* at  
Mr \* \* \* \* Corn Market  
Wexford

An anonymous correspondent thus invites him to cover himself with glory in a new mission :—

Dublin : Nov. 19th.

SIR,—I beg to be excused for sending you the letters of Ronge, which have been lately published in this city. You ought seriously

to inquire *in your closet*, where you are not so likely to be led away by the breath of popular applause, whether if you can in your conscience *support* the corruptions denounced by Ronge, or whether you can in silence look on while others practise such delusions on the people. The movement of Ronge has penetrated the whole of Germany—the Papal power is shaken to its centre, and if you look to the first article in the last *Quarterly Review*, you will perceive that France is ready for a similar movement, and that it will shortly break out in an open way, as it has done in Germany.

Take a bold step, follow the noble example of Ronge and disabuse the people's minds of their false notions, you would be followed by so large a party that in one year Ireland would become as beautiful and prosperous as any other part of the empire, instead of being pointed at as the land of blood and murder. If you delay, there is no doubt that in a year or two the work will be done without you; but it may fall into the hands of those who may teach infidelity instead of religion.

I am with great respect  
a Sincere Well-wisher to my Country.

And a Scotch philosopher benevolently suggests a mode of settling for ever the question of Irish distress:—

FATHER MATHEW,—I feel quite at a loss to address an Eminent Stranger. Edinr.

I have been reading a Travelers account of your great work, to soften, the misery to the populace of Ireland. He very naturally questions, can, it, continue? Few mortals are so gifted, for such an undertaking, either in Body, or mind. I have speculated, to find, a plan if possible, to prevent the cause of it, too incident only, to Ireland, of the Early MARRIGES. If some patriot, or wealthy Gentleman, on, promising, a gift, to those who would bring a *Certificate of the Man's Age*, above 25, and the woman turned of 20 years, (I would suppose furniture to their little dwelling) it would be a worthy use of Riches in the cause of virtue, and humanity—To bring a Family into Life, to suffer as now, is worse than Cattle. A Cow, has its grass cooked to eat a warm Coat, and a Comfortable Bed to lie on.—perhaps,—Dr Sir, as, you have done *more*, you may be able to persuade some kindred Heart, and Head, to try the Experiment The good fashion might spread, as, great events often arise, from small beginnings &c.

I avoid being Tedious and hope you will excuse my Letter. I have only ventured to write these few lines, relying on your belief it is a frail chance of Doing good.

By the post mark you will see it is from Scotland, but it is of no value to give my Name. With much Esteem

Decem<sup>r</sup> 1845

Your wellwisher —

no address, I, presume is necessary.

The land agent of a well-known gentleman writes an urgent letter, imploring Father Mathew to use his influence with an overholding tenant, to give up a dwelling-house belonging to the agent, 'without,' as the writer continues, 'putting me to the cost, trouble, and inconvenience of seeking the possession from a court of law.'

One would be inclined to say, from the samples given, that Father Mathew's correspondents occupied no small portion of his time and attention.

From necessity, he was compelled to devote to hard work those hours which, in justice to himself, ought to be more properly devoted to sleep; but he also availed himself of any favourable moment, during the day, to pay off some instalment of his accumulated debt to his correspondents. He was free from interruption during the silent hours of night, whereas during the day he was liable to be interfered with by his domestic tyrant—his servant John. The attachment of this austere servitor, however gratifying to his master's self-love, assumed, very frequently, most inconvenient opportunities for its manifestation. Thus, while Father Mathew was at work at his ink-spattered desk, the floor covered with the results of his precious labours, John would take a fit of troublesome cleanliness; and, after elaborately flapping the more prominent features of Lord Morpeth's bust with a duster, proceed to remove ideal specks and imaginary stains from the sideboard or the table; and after he had satisfactorily performed this important task, he would then direct his best energies to the picture frames, reserving his special

solicitude for the work of high art in worsted, for the merits of which he entertained an exalted opinion. Gradually would John invade the neighbourhood of the desk, and even crumple beneath his feet the leaves of manuscript which, after having hastily dashed them off, his master had thrown upon the ground. If he dared do it, John would have submitted the ink bottle to a general cleansing, and given the desk itself a comprehensive wipe of his duster; but his audacity was usually limited to abortive efforts at opening a conversation respecting the habits and customs of the English aristocracy, and the innovations lately adopted in the science of laying the dinner cloth in grand houses. Now Father Mathew was a man of exemplary patience, and could, without murmur, endure as much as most men; but to be thus interrupted, perhaps in the middle of a subject of great moment, and to feel your coat subjected to an elaborate dusting process as you were commencing a new paragraph, or rounding a sentence with grace, was something beyond the limit of mortal endurance. And just as John had reached this point, his master would start from his chair, and, looking down at the startled culprit, who now feared he had been pushing matters too far, would hurl this awful threat at his domestic,—‘John, if you continue to go on in this dreadful way, *I declare I must leave the house!*’ This tremendous threat never failed in its effect; and John invariably hid himself for a time in the darkest recess of his pantry.

## CHAPTER XXII.

Father Mathew's pecuniary Liabilities—His Unhappiness—The Medal Delusion—His Arrest—Items of Expenditure—Vindictory Statement—How the Money went—Silver Medals—The enduring Memorial—An edifying Balance-sheet—Valuable Testimonies—The Soldier's Gratitude.

THERE was, however, a trouble far less difficult to bear than the pressure of hard work, or the intrusion of a favourite and indulged domestic; that trouble arose from the daily increasing amount of his pecuniary liabilities. At times, the shadow of debt darkened the very sunlight, and haunted him like a spectre in his solitude. There was a period, yet to come, when the tyranny of the ever present idea of his obligations became insupportable, and crushed him to the earth; but, though in his fifty-third year in the year 1854, he still possessed the physical energy and vigour of ordinary men of thirty-five or forty, and the tone and strength of his mind were yet unimpaired. He could, therefore, resist a painful impression, at this period of his life, better than in half a dozen years after, when his constitution had received many severe shocks. Still the slavery of debt could not but have been keenly felt, at any time, or under any circumstances, by a man of his extreme sensibility and high notions of personal honour. There was also an additional bitterness imparted to this sufficiently bitter feeling—this arose from imputations as unjust as they were galling.

At the very moment when his liabilities amounted to a sum of 7,000*l.* it was asserted that he was in the possession