

CHAPTER XXX.

The Bishopric of Cork—Father Mathew is nominated by the Clergy—Letter from Father Prout—The Capuchin's Beard—Decision of the Holy See adverse to Father Mathew—Addresses from the Clergy and Laity—He bears the Disappointment bravely—His Friends the Rathbones.

THE Right Reverend Dr. Murphy, Catholic Bishop of Cork, one of the most learned prelates of his Church, died on the 7th of April 1847; and at the customary time—a month after—the parochial clergy of the diocese met for the purpose of nominating his successor. The clergy nominate by election; and, as a general rule, the candidate who stands '*dignissimus*' is appointed Bishop by the Holy See. It is usual that the clergyman who stands first of the three who are nominated by the Parish Priests of the diocese, is raised to the dignity of the Episcopate; but it occasionally happens that the Holy See, for reasons which it deems sufficient, selects the second, or even the third on the list, or goes out of the list and beyond the diocese, and appoints a priest who has no connection with the diocese, and who probably never dreamed of the mitre. The election is presided over by the Archbishop of the Province and his Suffragans; and the report forwarded by those prelates to Rome materially influences its decision. The result of the election—which was held in Cork in the month of May—was, that Father Mathew was placed highest on the list; and as there were but rare instances of the election of the clergy being overruled, and the first on the list not being appointed by the Holy See, it was taken for granted, by the public generally, that Theobald Mathew was in reality the future Bishop of Cork.

The election by his brother priests was the crowning honour of his life. It was the most emphatic testimony that could be borne to his public and private virtues. The delight of his fellow-citizens was unbounded; and whenever he appeared in the streets, he was met with congratulations as sincere as they were enthusiastic.

Father Mathew himself looked with much confidence to his receiving the briefs from Rome in due course, and accepted the congratulations of his friends as upon a matter of which there was no doubt whatever. He believed that the cause which he had so deeply at heart would be served by his elevation to the mitre; and if he had any apprehension as to the result, it was lest the cause might suffer through his failure. In the General of his order, in Rome, he knew he had an influential supporter; and an extract from a letter he received from a distinguished townsman and attached friend, the Rev. Francis Mahony, better known to the world of literature as the witty and erudite 'Father Prout,' will show how strong was the interest which the venerable Cardinal Micara, felt in his career. The letter was written from London, on the 20th of May 1847:—

I left Rome as above stated, but had previously ordered a bust of the *Irish Capuchin, robed in the cowl and habit of his order*, to be executed by Hogan; and although Cardinal Micara was laid up in bed with the gout when the present arrived in the Barberini Convent, I had the satisfaction, in calling next day, to find it placed conspicuously in his reception room, with the inscription as follows:

FRATER THEOBALDUS MATHEW,
ORDINIS CAPUCCINORUM; TEMPERANTIE
IN HIBERNIA ET UBIQUE TERRARUM
PROPUGNATOR.

The Cardinal several times mentioned to me his displeasure 'that you had never visited Rome,' which I fully explained by the nature of your labours, and the impossibility of interrupting them, save at the sacrifice of so many lives that depended upon your incessant toils. I mentioned that I hoped to induce you to visit him next October, after the harvest.

When the donor of the bust next visited the Cardinal, the latter asked—'Where is the beard of the Capuchin?' 'Beards are not worn in Ireland, your eminence,' replied Mr. Mahony. 'Then is Father Mathew, the Capuchin, ashamed of his order?' demanded the Cardinal, whose silver beard fell low on his breast. The bust was taken back to the Irish sculptor; and when it reappeared in the state room of the Cardinal, it was enriched with a beard, at once orthodox and picturesque.

There were many, however, who, while joining in the universal satisfaction at this signal mark of respect and confidence which had been paid to him by his brother priests, dreaded that his elevation to the responsible position of the spiritual head of an extensive diocese would have the effect of taking him from his great work of moral reformation. Though the Church would gain a popular bishop, the cause might lose its powerful, because trusted leader.

Immediately upon the result of the election being made known, an address was presented to Father Mathew by the Catholic clergy (secular and regular) of the city of Cork. It bore the signatures of twenty-three clergymen, none of whom—inasmuch as they were not parish priests—could have taken part in the election. They not unnaturally desired to show how thoroughly they agreed in the decision arrived at by their reverend brethren, who, possessing the right to vote, had so fully represented the feelings of the general body of the clergy. The address and answer form a fitting portion of this biography.

ADDRESS

FROM THE CATHOLIC CLERGY OF THE CITY OF CORK TO THE VERY
REV. T. MATHEW, MINISTER PROVINCIAL OF THE CAPUCHIN ORDER IN
IRELAND.

VERY REV. DEAR SIR,—We, the Undersigned Clergymen of the City of Cork, hasten to convey to you our warmest congratulation upon the high position in which you have been placed by the choice of the

Parish Priests of this Diocese. In so placing you, we had not, and, from circumstances, could not have, any part. The decision, however, arrived at by the majority of those with whom the choice rested, merits and obtains our entire approval. This we deem it right to convey to you in the present form.

You, Very Reverend dear Sir, have been associated in the Ministry with some amongst us for many years; to others you are endeared by ties of affection formed in childhood, and strengthened by the experience of a riper age; and you are known and esteemed by all as a most laborious Priest, a consistent and ever-active friend of the Poor, and a truly zealous promoter of every measure which has for its object the interests and honour of God's church and the welfare of God's people.

Should the decision of The Supreme Pontiff confide to your care the charge of this diocese, the attainment of the high objects of the Episcopal office will, in your person, be greatly facilitated by the extensive and well-deserved influence over all classes which your many and exalted virtues, during a long career of unexampled usefulness, have already secured to you.

Accept, Very Reverend and dear Sir, the assurance of warm regard and sincere respect with which we remain your Faithful Friends and Brethren.

Cork, May 8, 1847.

To which address, so honouring alike to its authors and its object, Father Mathew returned the following grateful reply:—

VERY REV. AND REV. BRETHREN, MY VERY DEAR FRIENDS,—I receive with the deepest respect and gratitude the expression of your regard for myself, and of your concurrence in the vote by which the Venerable Parish Priests of this Diocese have conferred on my humble self the highest honour in their power to bestow.

I cannot deem myself worthy of so high and responsible a position, neither am I influenced by any feelings of personal ambition—but I feel deeply at receiving such a testimony from a body of Clergymen in talent and virtues distinguished in the Irish Church, and endeared to me by the closest ties of the friendship of many years.

Whatever may be the decision of the Holy See, I shall during my life treasure up the remembrance of this day; and in any sphere in which it may please God to place me, I trust I shall never forget how much I owe to the kindness and affection of my Brethren in the Ministry.

THEOBALD MATHEW.

The decision of Rome was adverse to Father Mathew, and was also undoubtedly opposed to the wishes of the Catholic community, not only of the city of Cork, but of the country generally. However, after the first burst of disappointment passed away, it became apparent that Rome had decided for the best, and that the wise and learned prelate who had been placed over the affairs of one of the most important dioceses of Ireland was in reality the one who was best suited for the discharge of its duties. It did not require the lapse of many years to deepen this belief into a conviction; and it is due to the Right Rev. Dr. Delany to say, that no bishop of the Catholic Church of Ireland more thoroughly deserves the confidence and affection of his own flock, or the respect of those who differ from him in faith.

In the month of June, the decision of the Holy See in favour of Dr. Delany was announced; and on the 2nd of July there appeared, in the public press of the city, an address from the inhabitants of the City and County of Cork, with one thousand names attached thereto.

From feelings of delicacy, and out of deference to the Holy See, this address was not made public until after it was known that Father Mathew was not to be the Bishop of Cork. It originated with laymen, and every signature of the thousand which it bore was that of a layman; and had an address of the kind been published while the matter was yet undecided, it might have been taken as an attempt to bring pressure to bear upon Rome by a demonstration of lay opinion—a course which would not have been altogether respectful. But the decision being adverse to those who signed the address, it would have appeared cowardly and unworthy, on their part, if they *then* shrank from the public expression of the feelings which they entertained for their illustrious fellow-citizen. Therefore the address was published. It was in the following terms:—

TO THE
VERY REV. THEOBALD MATHEW.

THE ADDRESS OF THE UNDERSIGNED ROMAN CATHOLIC INHABITANTS
OF THE COUNTY AND CITY OF CORK.

VERY REV. DEAR SIR,—We, the undersigned Roman Catholic inhabitants of the County and City of Cork, encouraged by the example of our beloved Clergy, venture thus publicly to embody in an address of congratulation the sentiments of heartfelt delight which, in common with the whole nation, animate every class—nay, almost every individual of this great community—at the high tribute paid by the venerated Parish Priests of this Diocese, at the late election for bishop, to your eminent virtues as a Catholic Pastor, and to your enduring services in behalf of a grateful country.

These venerable and venerated men deserve well of Ireland. Forgetting self, and the natural partiality which would suggest no appointment but one from amongst the pious and exemplary members of their own order, they, in the first election for Diocesan ever held here, placed prominently in their list one of the regular clergy—because of his high merits, his great charities, his unaffected piety, his unceasing labours as a minister of God; and because, too, of the unbounded respect and veneration entertained for him by all classes and creeds in the British Empire; thus exhibiting to the world the cordial union existing within the bosom of the Church, and the high religious sentiment which influenced the election.

As humble members of that Church, we may be permitted to rejoice at the prospect of having as our future bishop the man who so triumphantly achieved the moral regeneration of his country, who taught Irishmen the value of self-respect, and—an evident instrument in the hands of Providence—rooted out those degrading habits that weakened the influence of religion, and, while rendering our countrymen the victims of bad passions, brutalised their intellects, and made the name of Irishman a byword and a shame.

We can well imagine the gratification with which the Supreme Pontiff will receive the selection which has been made. In his Holiness the Christian world recognises one distinguished for those high intellectual qualities that are so eminently adapted for his exalted station—an enlarged mind, a discerning judgement, great firmness of purpose, and an untiring determination to advance the interests of religion. Having constantly in view this, his one great object,

we may well conjecture how gratified his Holiness will feel at the opportunity afforded him to obtain for the Church, in a higher sphere of action, the energy, the wisdom and the influence of our venerated 'Apostle;' for amongst the many acts which will illustrate the Pontificate of Pius IX. none, we feel confident, will shed more real lustre on his reign than the appointment of you, Very Rev. dear Sir, to the Irish Episcopacy.

That such may be your destiny is our earnest prayer, not for our own sake, for no rank can give elevation to you—not for your own sake, for we well know how, even now, you would shrink from the eminence into which you have been forced, and how you would delight to pursue your Herculean labours with an humbleness and modesty as characteristic as your zeal—but for the sake of the religion we profess, of the hierarchy we respect, of the country we love, we pray it may be your destiny to be associated in the Episcopacy with the venerated prelates who now shed so bright and enduring a lustre on the Irish Church.

[Here follow the signatures.]

It has been intimated, in an early portion of this work, that Father Mathew was not a theologian—that he lacked that professional knowledge so essentially necessary to the head and ruler of a diocese; besides, it was too notorious that he was reckless in his charities, and crippled in his resources. Had he been elevated to the mitre *before* he had become embarrassed in his pecuniary affairs, or before his habit of scattering money profusely had been confirmed, he would, no doubt, have managed to confine his charities, within something like moderate bounds; and though he would have stripped himself of the last shilling which he could call his own, and denied himself every personal comfort, to relieve the distress of his fellow-creatures, still the responsibility of his position, and the obligation of affording an example to his clergy, would have saved him from the pain and humiliation of pecuniary embarrassment. But he had gone too far to retrace his steps; and the horrors of the famine, which he hourly endeavoured to mitigate by his exhaustless generosity, was plunging him into new difficulties, and into deeper entanglements, from which he was never afterwards emanci-

pated.* Therefore, on this ground alone, and putting strictly professional considerations aside, the decision of the Holy See, though adverse to the wish and feeling of the moment, was soon acquiesced in, as being not only wise and just, but most for the advantage and interest of the Church.

However Father Mathew may have felt the blow—and he *did* feel it acutely—he never in the slightest degree manifested either soreness or disappointment. If the wound bled, it was internally. Indeed, it must be added, there was no cause whatever for bitterness of feeling, for no human being triumphed over him, or sought to mortify him on account of his disappointment; on the contrary, the reverence of the public assumed a character at once deeper and more affectionate, and in every countenance he could read the expression of that respect which was universally entertained towards him. To the work of charity, then, he devoted himself with renewed energy; and in the knowledge that he was assisting to do good, to save life, and mitigate the sufferings of the destitute who besieged his door, he experienced a satisfaction and consolation which no dignity, however exalted, could ever bestow.

In this season of national calamity he made many friendships, which lasted during the remaining years of his life;

* Among his other causes of pecuniary embarrassment was his Church of the Holy Trinity. That a church, to replace the wretched crib in Blackmoor Lane, had been felt to be necessary, not only by its congregation, who constantly overflowed into the lane in front of its entrance, but by the citizens generally, was proved by the eagerness with which it was undertaken. It was unfortunate for Father Mathew's future peace of mind that he did not consent to accept one of the finest sites in the city—on Sullivan's Quay, opposite the Grand Parade—for his new church. At times, he was impetuous, and not a little self-willed; and in hastily obtaining another site (in an impulse of irritation at what he conceived to be an unfair demand), he made a fatal mistake, and acted in opposition to the wishes of his committee. A fatal mistake, indeed; for not only was the site which he adopted a bad one, but a foundation had to be constructed at immense cost. Then, the design was too elaborate in external ornament, and had to be, to a considerable extent, abandoned, as may be seen to this day. Out of a gross sum of 14,000*l.* expended on this building, Father Mathew supplied about half that amount out of his own resources. The state of the country from 1846 seriously interfered with his collections, thereby throwing upon him additional personal responsibility.

and no friends whom he had known at any period of his career were truer, more generous, or more unwearying and unselfish in their kindness towards him, than the Rathbone family. Their friendship never wavered or failed during his life, and it still blooms, fresh and bright, upon his tomb. William Rathbone, the eminent Liverpool merchant, had large quantities of breadstuffs consigned to him from America, for distribution in Ireland; and believing that he could most fully carry out the intentions of the benevolent donors of this welcome relief by a personal visit to Ireland, he went there with his wife and son. On his arrival in Cork, he consulted with his friend Miss Jennings—a lady well known as the most devoted enthusiast in the cause of negro emancipation—as to the best person to whom he could entrust a considerable portion of his consignment. ‘I will introduce you to the right man,’ said Miss Jennings, who, having effected the promised introduction, was thus the means of originating a friendship to which every successive year but added new strength. ‘Father Mathew,’ said Mr. Rathbone, ‘would you have any objection to let us see, with our own eyes, what your plans are, and how you work out your relief systematically—in fact, what practical steps you have taken to relieve the distress of which you complain?’ Father Mathew assured him that, not only had he no objection to show him everything, but that nothing could be more to his wish than that Mr. Rathbone should see everything for himself. Accordingly, next morning, Father Mathew conducted the party—consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Rathbone, Mr. Robert Rathbone, and the captain of the American vessel which had brought the cargo of corn, meal, and flour—to poor schools, in which several hundred children were at breakfast; to work-rooms, in which young girls were provided with a substantial meal; and to food depôts and soup kitchens. The party were greatly impressed with the misery which they witnessed, and the practical relief so wisely ad-

ministered. ‘All well,’ said Mr. Rathbone; ‘no doubt you relieve the poor, and that the distress is very great; but we should like to see some particulars, some individual instances, of this distress.’ ‘Then,’ replied Father Mathew, ‘we have only to enter the first house in the first lane we come to.’ Arriving at the first house of the first lane to be met with, Father Mathew entered it, leaving the party before the door. He returned in a moment, saying—‘This house contains ten occupants, six of whom are in typhus fever at this moment. Come and see them, if you have no objection.’ Mr. and Mrs. Rathbone naturally hesitated at accepting so startling an offer; but their son at once volunteered to enter. ‘No,’ said the captain, ‘you must not go in there, in the midst of contagion. I have neither wife nor child belonging to me, and I need not care.’ The captain then went in, entered the different rooms, looked about him, and made various enquiries; and when he returned into the street he declared that the misery he had witnessed was beyond description, and that he could not have imagined anything more appalling. The party did not require further proof of the reality of the misery which they desired to relieve.

From that moment Theobald Mathew obtained the confidence of William Rathbone, who soon thoroughly appreciated the nature of the man—its weakness as well as its strength. Merchant and man of business as he was, he could well understand how Father Mathew, who could as soon fly in the air as keep accounts on commercial principles, must of necessity plunge himself in embarrassment, in his eagerness to relieve the distress that surrounded him on every side. He well knew how the first tale of misery whispered in his ear, in the little parlour in Cove Street, would have proved fatal to a balance on the credit side. Writing to the author, in January 1863, of his recollection of Father Mathew in 1847, Mr. Rathbone says:—

Of our first meeting I remember little ; but the pleasing impression of his frank, genial bearing, his clear open countenance—the general impression of goodness and power which his whole appearance and manner conveyed—was very strong. As we saw more of him, we were much struck with his *practical efficiency*, which was not remarkable in some of the committees. One day the soup of one of the relief committees was bad. The committee were at a loss for the cause. Father Mathew was empowered to examine. He saw the oatmeal, tested it, and found it unsound. He himself examined the boilers, at six o'clock in the morning, and found a crust an inch thick left from former boilings. This was the right way to come at the cause, and Father Mathew adopted it. . . . His house had, at that time, little furniture ; no carpets, but remains of straw, for at night it was filled with poor creatures who had no other home.

When he afterwards visited Liverpool, after his first attack, the impression of *goodness* was the same, but the *power* was gone.

CHAPTER XXXI.

O'Connell's Death—Sorrow of the Nation—Alleged Causes of his Death—Father Mathew's respect for O'Connell—Roughly Treated—Successful Remonstrance—His Famine Sermon.

A MEMORABLE year for Ireland was the year 1847. The death of O'Connell added no little to the gloom in which the famine had enveloped every home in the land. Whatever the opinions which were held of the great tribune by persons of opposing politics and adverse parties, it was conceded on all hands that no one loved his country more earnestly and passionately than he did. They may have reprobated his policy, and denounced his agitation, but they could not deny him the merit of patriotic attachment to his country. Perhaps those who most vehemently opposed O'Connell were some of the more extreme of the national party, whose warlike doctrines he had strenuously resisted ; but, as time rolled on, the feeling of opposition died out, and gave place to a juster appreciation of the man who had achieved the greatest triumph by the most blameless means, and with whom love of Ireland was ever the uppermost thought of his mind and feeling of his heart. But to the great mass of his countrymen—the Catholic population of Ireland—his death was a heavy blow. They mourned in unaffected sorrow the loss, not only of the Emancipator of his fellow Catholics throughout the British Empire, but the leader to whom for many years they had been accustomed to look for advice and guidance on all public questions. The deep feeling of sorrow with which the sad intelligence from Genoa—in which city he