

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

died, on the 15th of May, in the 72nd year of his age, on his way to the Holy City, where he hoped to have breathed his last—was received in Ireland, was as creditable to his fellow-countrymen as it was honouring to the fame and memory of O'Connell.

The death of that great man was attributed to various causes; among others, to the effect which his imprisonment in 1844 had upon him, mentally and physically; and also to the influence which the disasters of his country produced upon a man of a highly impressionable nature, and one who so thoroughly identified himself with its fortunes. Then there was the sudden break up which usually takes place in men of gigantic frame and prodigious strength of intellect and body, the moment the first symptoms of decay are manifested. The consciousness of his having been worsted—even though temporarily—in his struggle with the Government of the day, must have had a depressing effect upon the successful leader, who had so long and so justly boasted that he could 'drive a coach and six through any Act of Parliament;' but the deprivation of his healthful mountain exercise, enjoyed amidst the wild and romantic scenery of his native Iveragh, must also have told terribly on his health. O'Connell delighted in the music of his dogs, as it echoed amid the hills, and he loved the grand roar of the Atlantic, as its waves broke in thunder upon the rocky headlands that girt his home of Derrynane; and not all the flattering addresses which he received from every parish in Ireland, not all the sympathy which was felt from one end of the country to the other for the imprisoned chief, could compensate him for those fresh breezes of the hill and the sea-shore, which made his blood dance in his veins, and his heart feel young again. Then came the failure of 1845, and the crushing disaster of 1846, to say nothing of the struggles and contentions in which the Apostle of Moral Force was continuously engaged with the advocates of the Sword. With the sorrows and the misfortunes of his

country, a man like O'Connell could not but sympathise heart and soul; and the contemplation of the ruin which no effort of his could either arrest or prevent, must have tended to bow his spirit and depress his vital energy. The grand old tree was struck by the lightning, and it fell with a crash to the earth, causing a shudder through the land.

From the sorrowing son of the illustrious dead, Father Mathew received the following:—

Gowan Hill, Dalkey: May 31, 1847.

VERY REV. DEAR SIR,—Of your charity, I pray humbly for your prayers for the eternal repose of my dear, dear father.

His beloved remains may be in Ireland in about three weeks, to rest in Glasnevin Cemetery, as there most accessible to the people he laboured for.

Most respectfully,

Your faithful humble servant,

JOHN O'CONNELL.

The Very Rev. Theobald Mathew.

Father Mathew at once responded to the filial appeal of O'Connell's best beloved son, by a letter full of the tenderest sympathy. Dreading the influence of the Repeal agitation on the temperance movement, he was ever on the watch to save his cause from the risk of being compromised by the taint of politics; but he never ceased to admire and feel grateful to the man who was the champion of his Church, and the liberator of its people, its priests, and its altars. An extract from his letter to John O'Connell will sufficiently exhibit this feeling, which was shared in by the priests of the Catholic Church throughout the world:—

... Few have known longer or more intimately, or have more honoured and loved your great and good father. In the Holy Sacrifice I daily present him before the throne of the Most High; and on thousands of altars, from the rising to the setting sun, the tremendous mysteries are celebrated by priests of our holy Church, for the eternal repose of the soul of him who is wept by the whole world. In common with all the inhabitants of the south of Ireland, I regret being

deprived of the melancholy consolation of paying my tribute of respectful sorrow to the remains of the illustrious dead. Yet I must acquiesce in the propriety of selecting for the honoured resting-place of O'Connell the metropolis of Ireland. I fervently pray that the Lord may grant to you and your beloved family every spiritual and temporal blessing.

Your faithful and devoted friend,
THEOBALD MATHEW.

John O'Connell, Esq., M. P.

The following from John O'Connell is an evidence of the gratitude with which the kind and consolatory letter of Father Mathew was received in the house of mourning :—

Gowan Hill : June 6, 1847

VERY REV. DEAR SIR,—(Thank God! it will soon be 'My Lord.') God bless you for your kind, consoling, affectionate letter. It is a consolation, and a great one to us, in the house of our heavy affliction.

I do assure you, Very Rev. dear sir, *he reciprocated* your kind sentiments, while he deeply, truly, and so deservedly revered you.

Ever your most respectfully attached and deeply grateful (DEEPLY AND DOUBLY),

JOHN O'CONNELL.

Very Rev. Theobald Mathew.

The mortality in the city of Cork had now reached to such an extent, that Father Mathew was compelled to close his cemetery against any further interments, or at least until such sanitary precautions had been taken as would prevent injury to the public health. From the 1st of September 1846, to the 1st of June 1847—a period of nine months—10,000 bodies had been buried in this cemetery! This number did not include the burials from the workhouse, for which a separate graveyard had been provided. If it be considered that there were other burial places in the city, and in the neighbourhood of the city, in all of which interments were frequent, some idea may be formed of the mortality of the Famine Years.

Towards the end of May, the Cork District Relief Committee suspended its operations. The food depôts of the city were supported by and under the management of this body,

and, as a necessary consequence, were closed when its functions terminated. Father Mathew, apprehending the vast misery which would ensue from their being closed at such a period of distress, took upon himself the entire responsibility of maintaining the Southern depôt—that nearest to his own house; and this he kept open for a considerable time, partly at his personal cost, and partly by the charitable contributions of the benevolent. In addition to the three large boilers belonging to this depôt, Father Mathew erected three new boilers; by which he was enabled, at an expense of 130*l.* per week, to feed between 5,000 and 6,000 famishing human beings. The daily average consumption of Indian meal amounted to one ton and a quarter; and this was made into a wholesome and nutritious stirabout, for which ravening hunger supplied an unfailing appetite. The doors were thrown open at an early hour in the morning, and kept open till one o'clock in the day, and everyone that entered was supplied with a sufficiency of this food.

An undertaking of this nature involved great risk. At the rate specified, the expenditure amounted to nearly 600*l.* a month; and where there were so many other claims upon the public, the difficulty of meeting this large outlay was necessarily increased. Impressed with the serious nature of the responsibility which he had assumed, his brother Charles ventured to remonstrate with him, saying—'It is all very well so long as you have funds to provide for the daily wants of those people. So long as you feed them, they will bless you, and regard you as their benefactor. But suppose your means fail, and you can no longer supply the multitude with their expected food, what will happen then? Why they will turn upon you and revile you, as the author of their misery. For God's sake! think of what you are doing.' 'My dear Charles, I do think of what I am doing, and I trust in the goodness of God. In Him I put my trust, and He will not desert me.' Nor did He; for at the very moment these words

were being uttered, a letter was handed to Father Mathew by the servant—and this letter brought intelligence of the arrival in the harbour of a vessel with a cargo of breadstuffs from America, part of which was consigned to him. 'Now, Charles, was I not right in saying that I had no fear, because I trusted in the goodness of God? Glory and honour be to His blessed name!'

The door of the yard of the *depôt* was shut at one o'clock; but if any poor person had not received the customary dole of food, it was the practice, as a matter of course, for them to turn to the house in Cove Street, from which food was distributed at all hours of the day. On one occasion, some dozen poor people were lingering in the yard of the *depôt*, having arrived too late, the daily supply having been exhausted at an earlier hour than usual. The appearance of these poor creatures was deplorable; and Donnelly, a member of Father Mathew's staff, now performing the functions of a Relieving officer of the Mathew Commission, desired them to follow him to 'the house.' As Donnelly left the *depôt*, the number of his followers did not exceed twenty, but they soon swelled to hundreds, and by the time he reached the door of the house in Cove Street, there were not less than a thousand persons massed in front of the well-known dwelling. The bread was at hand, and Donnelly did his best to distribute it impartially. Father Mathew stood meanwhile in the window of his room—for the term dining-room, or drawing-room, would be out of place in this instance—watching the proceedings. Suddenly he rushed down stairs, and, to Donnelly's great amazement, charged him with being a wicked and unfeeling man, and, in fact, a disgrace to humanity. 'Good law! your reverence, what did I do?' 'What did you do? You passed over a poor cripple—a poor helpless creature—who is over there, leaning against the wall. I am ashamed of you, sir.' 'I declare, your reverence, I did my best; but the crowd shoved me

about so, that I did n't know what I was doing,' said poor Donnelly. 'Well, sir, I will show you how you ought to manage, so that there will be no confusion in future, and that everyone will have a fair share. Go and divide the people into two rows, one on each side of the street, and I will bring out a basket of bread, you will bring another, and then you will see how easily I can distribute it.' Donnelly did as he was desired, and arranged the crowd into two lines, with a wide space in the centre. Out Father Mathew came, with a large basket of bread in one hand; and Donnelly and another member of the staff followed with similar supplies. 'Now,' said Father Mathew, 'observe what I am doing.' Things went on well for a minute or so, while the priest was imparting his valuable lesson to his follower; but soon the two sides of the living wall closed upon the instructor, and, blocking up the passage, held him a prisoner. He remonstrated and implored, but in vain; their eagerness to clutch at the bread rendered them insensible to all considerations of delicacy; and when he did at length free himself from the tremendous crush, it was at the sacrifice of his best coat, which was slit up from the waist to the collar! For a moment, the good man was in a towering rage, and he vowed 'never to have anything more to do with such nasty and ill-behaved people,' and that they should never receive any further relief at his hands. 'But, sir, said Donnelly to the author, 'there he was at it again next morning, as fresh as ever, and as if nothing had happened, and he kissing the poor little dirty children, and calling them all the tender names in the world. Oh, sir, he *was* a good man.'

Feeling apprehensive of the future safety of the potato crop, in which the people so blindly trusted, Father Mathew used every possible effort to dispel the prejudice which existed amongst the poor against that wholesome and substantial food, Indian meal, or the '*yellow meal*,' as it was termed. He might frequently be seen standing at his hall-door, with a

bright fragment of a well-made cake in his hand, and affecting to eat pieces from it with intense relish. By word, by example, as well as by presents of nice-looking and palatable loaves of this valuable food, he did more than any other man in Ireland to render it not only acceptable to, but comparatively popular with the people, who at first regarded it with aversion.

Father Mathew's influence upon the wealthier classes was most valuable at this trying moment, and he did not fail to exercise it freely in the cause of his clients, the poor. An instance will happily exemplify the value of this influence, and the manner in which it was exercised.

Among the industrial schools and work-rooms to which the famine gave birth, was one to which a number of charitable ladies attached themselves. Besides providing employment for the destitute girls who worked in its classes, the patronesses of the school supplied their pupils with breakfast, thus ensuring to them the certainty of one meal in the day—no light boon at such a time. This breakfast was continued to be given for several months, and with the best results; but the funds falling somewhat low, the ladies became alarmed, and, seeing no immediate prospect of their being replenished, they determined at least to take into consideration the expediency of not giving it beyond a certain period. A day was appointed for the consideration of the proposal; and the subject being one of very grave importance, a large attendance was the consequence. The lady who first expressed her opinion as to the necessity of discontinuing the breakfast now brought the matter forward, and the other ladies felt that its continuance beyond the time specified would involve the institution in debt, and perhaps destroy its usefulness; and the question was about to be decided according to that view, when Father Mathew entered. On being told what had occurred, he seemed greatly moved; and turning to the assembled ladies, many of whom were his most intimate

friends, he said that 'the proposal of discontinuing the breakfast surprised and indeed shocked him beyond measure. When he was entering the building, he saw a number of handsome equipages drawn up outside the door, and when he entered he saw the room crowded with ladies elegantly and even sumptuously dressed. Seeing this, he naturally wondered how any such proposal could find support among persons surrounded by such appearances of wealth; and he especially wondered how ladies of their position and circumstances could think of refusing a solitary meal to their poor starving sisters, the virtuous daughters of decent parents, whom God, for His own wise ends, had afflicted with an unexpected calamity.' 'Why,' said he, 'the very ornaments that adorn your persons would provide an abundant breakfast for these innocent young girls for a considerable time.' 'Oh, Father Mathew,' said the lady by whom the proposal had been brought forward, 'forgive me! It was I who made the proposal, and I am sorry for it. I know I did wrong. But there is a friend who will give me 40*l.* tomorrow, and I shall send it to the treasurer. We must not give up the breakfast.' The effect was irresistible, and such arrangements were at once entered into as ensured the continuance of the much-required meal so long as relief of the kind was necessary. The 40*l.* from the 'friend' was from the pocket of the lady herself, who was as generous as she was impulsive. Father Mathew was not without having a personal interview on his own account with the treasurer of the charity.

At no period of his ministry was his preaching more effective than in the very midst of the terrible famine, with misery and sorrow and death on every side. Little time had he to compose an artificial discourse at that moment, when every energy was strained in devising and administering relief. I remember a charity sermon at which I was present, and how the congregation testified, by their emotion

as well as by their liberal response to his appeal, their belief in the truth of his descriptions of the horrors which then abounded. The passages quoted are not certainly models of style; but such was the earnestness and pathos of the preacher, and the belief in the truth of the pictures which he drew from his daily and hourly experiences, that the eloquence of Massillon or Bourdaloue could not have produced a more thrilling or touching effect. They are given here, not only as being characteristic of the man, and descriptive of the time, but also as they represent the sublime charity which was exhibited by the poor to those more wretched than themselves—the latter being a theme on which, because of his admiration of that marvellous charity, and because of the salutary influence which it produced upon the rich, he loved to dwell. The plaintive tones, the wailing voice, the impassioned earnestness of the orator—rather, indeed, of this apostle of charity—more than atoned for any defects of style in passages such as these:—

Were I permitted to rouse the men of wealth from their dream of avarice, the ladies of fashion from their silken lethargy, would they permit me to conduct them for one day, where they ought to go every day, and where they should esteem it a high privilege to be allowed to go—to the abodes of pain and sorrow, to the squalid receptacles of the agonised and the dying—I would answer for their hearts. They are surely of flesh and blood; but were they hard as adamant, they would not resist the cries of the famishing little creatures tortured by extreme want, and wrung with tormenting pain. There, amidst the chilling damp of a dismal hovel, see yon famine-stricken fellow-creature; see him extended on his scanty bed of rotten straw; see his once manly frame, that labour had strengthened with vigour, shrunk to a skeleton; see his once ruddy complexion, the gift of temperance, changed by hunger and concomitant disease to a sallow ghastly hue. See him extend his yellow withering arm for assistance! hear how he cries out in agony for food, for since yesterday he has not even moistened his lips! See his affectionate wife, though involved in the same distress, tenderly endeavouring to lighten his sufferings, and during the long and sorrowful night supporting his drooping head. See his little children pressing round him with their

wants. He fixes upon them his piercing dying looks. Oh! who can conceive the anguish, the exquisite anguish, that now rends the father's heaving breast! Turning his gaze from the killing scene, he lifts his hollow eyes to heaven, and lays before his God his intense grief. O Christians, Christians! is not this wretched man your brother? Is not the Great God of all that wretched being's Father? Can you, men of wealth—can you, my female auditors—contemplate such a dismal spectacle, without feeling the warm tide of sensibility rushing to your bosoms? That abject, that degraded being is not amongst you, who is not now resolved to subtract from costly ornaments, jewellery, and dress, to sacrifice some favourite folly, to retrench even the ordinary expenses of your families, and be content with the simple necessaries of life, and give this day into benevolent hands the honourable savings, that they may buy bread that the poor may eat. The triumph, the pure feast of soul, which this action would afford, would leave at an infinite distance behind, the selfish indulgence of vanity, or the sordid gratification of sense.

She is scarcely sixteen. She was once the only darling child of fond indulgent parents. Her father, in early manhood, was cut off by fever, and the mother was left alone to provide for her orphan daughter. Disappointed in every struggle for bread, pressed down by the iron hand of adversity, worn out in the remembrance of the friends of former days, she is obliged to hide herself from the light of day in the gloom and damp of a dark cellar. She soon dies of a broken heart, and leaves her child to the cold charity of a pitiless world. This poor forlorn child being left to herself, she soon fell the prey of the foul seducer. Her black career of sin is soon ended. See her now extended on that scanty bed of straw, pale, emaciated, abandoned by all; no friendly hand to wash away her bloody tears, no pious lips to pour into her broken heart the balm of religious consolation. Shall she be left a prey to despair, to perish for ever? O no, O no! your charity this day, like a summer's sun, will penetrate and cheer her dreary habitation. Your plenteous charity this day, like dew from heaven, will descend upon her, and this faded flower will bloom again. This poor prodigal will again return, and find here, through Christ, the way to repentance and to heaven.

The rich, comparatively speaking, give nothing. That is, there is no proportion between their wealth and their charity. But the poor support the poor; and if there were not an universal destitution amongst the operatives of our city, we would not be branded with

the burning shame of being obliged to avow, that in the midst of the blaze of affluence which our city presents, hundreds of our fellow-creatures have perished for want at the very rich man's gates. I could recount instances of heroic charity, amongst the poorest of the poor, at this very period, that would do honour—that are worthy—of the apostolic era. A desolate widow in my immediate neighbourhood, whose sole support is a bed for lodgers, has under her roof, for the last six weeks, an aged stranger, whom nobody knows. She tends him, and feeds him, as tenderly as if he were her brother. There is a lonely plain-work woman advanced in years, who resides in Chamberlain's Alley, in the parish of St. Nicholas, who has for many months supported, out of her scanty earnings, a helpless female; and if she were her mother, she could not love her more. And on last Monday, an interesting child was abandoned in the streets by its unnatural parent; and when it was about to be sent to the work-house, a poor man, a scavenger, with his broom in his hand, who, with tearful eye, was looking on, came and solicited the child; and when it was given to him, his countenance beamed with joy, he clasped the helpless innocent in his arms, and brought it rejoicing to his humble dwelling. There are, to my own certain knowledge, at this moment, cherished by the very poor in the poorest portion of this city, the parishes of SS. Nicholas and Fin Barr, more than thirty children, whose unhappy parents perished during the famine. On beholding such charity as this, well may I apply to these blessed poor the words of the Saviour to the widow and her mite—'Amen, I say unto you, she has given more than all.' O ye rich! how your merit fades before charity like this. Oh, that I could anticipate the glorious welcome that awaits these merciful beings on the great accounting day. Oh, may my death be the death of the righteous, and may my end be like to theirs! . . .

CHAPTER XXXII.

He receives a Royal Pension—Important Explanation—Invading John's Pantry—John's Refuge—Father Mathew's Pets—Letters to Mrs. Rathbone—His deserved Popularity.

IT had been for some time the intention of the more influential friends of Father Mathew to raise such a sum of money as would provide him with an annuity sufficient to maintain him independently, and thus enable him to prosecute his mission free from the embarrassment of pecuniary cares. His devoted friend Mr. S. C. Hall was one of the most active and untiring on this occasion. The principal result, however, of this organisation was, that the claims of the Moral Reformer of the age were brought directly under the attention of the Government, many members of which were friendly to him, and favourable to the object sought to be attained; and that the services rendered by Father Mathew to the interests of the public peace and the cause of humanity were formally recognised. The fact that Her Majesty had granted him a pension of 300*l.* a year, was thus conveyed to Father Mathew by Lord John Russell, who had acted towards him in a kindly and generous manner on former occasions:—

Chesham Place: June 22, 1847.

REVEREND SIR,—It is with much pleasure I inform you that the Queen has been pleased to direct me that an annual pension of 300*l.* should be settled upon you out of Her Majesty's Civil List, as a mark of her approbation of your meritorious exertions in combating the intemperance which in so many instances obscured and rendered fruitless the virtues of your countrymen.