

FATHER MATHEW: HIS LIFE AND LESSONS.

On October 10, 1890, the whole English-speaking world united in commemorating the birth of the Rev. Theobald Mathew, the first apostle of total abstinence, and one of the greatest benefactors of the human race.

It is hard for us, at the present day, when the virtue of total abstinence is held in high honour, and total abstinence associations flourish within and without the Church, and public opinion bears hard on the drunkard, to understand how different the world was in this respect when Father Mathew was born into it, and when more than half a century ago he consecrated himself to his Heaven-appointed mission.

Popular contemporary fiction is ordinarily a very faithful reflex of social custom and sentiment. The novels published in the English language during the first sixty years of the present century literally reek with beer and brandy. Drunkenness is merely an amiable weakness, eminently becoming a gentleman; and, on the other side, though the proposition is hardly formulated, one cannot help feeling that total abstinence is a parsimonious and poor-spirited virtue.

Some there are, however, who need not the aid of stern statistics, or the reflex of past popular sentiment through the novelists, to recall the frightful prevalence of drunkenness in England, Ireland, and America four or five decades ago.

Let us briefly recapitulate the life of Father Mathew, the modern St. George, who did not fear to fight single-handed the hydra-headed dragon of drunkenness at the day of its lustiest strength; and who, if he did not destroy it, at least dealt it blows from which it has never fully recovered, and diminished its power for evil for all time.

Theobald Mathew was born at Thomastown, County Kilkenny, Ire., Oct. 10, 1790. He was of a sweet and winning disposition, unselfish, generous, incapable of a revengeful thought, and intense in his affections.

He early showed a vocation to the priesthood, and after a careful course of study, largely under the direction of the Rev. Celestine Corcoran, of Dublin, was ordained a priest of the Capuchin Order, in 1814, by Archbishop Murray. For over twenty years he devoted himself to the severest pastoral duty, chiefly in the city of Cork. He was not at that time a remarkable orator, and yet there was a charm about him which held immense audiences, of every condition for as long as he chose to keep them. He was a remarkably well-built, handsome man, it is true, with a wonderful share of what we call personal magnetism; but it was the sweetness of spirit, the absolute sincerity, which shone in his beautiful eyes and rang through his voice, which drew men's hearts.

Despite the bitterness of existing religious prejudices, he was almost as influential among Protestants as among Catholics. His heroic labours among the plague-stricken of every form of belief, during the cholera-epidemic of 1832, had much to do with this. He was a great advocate of popular education, and founded schools for the poor and various literary institutions. His pastoral labours revealed one fact to him in clearest light—that over-indulgence in intoxicating drinks was a cancer in the very heart of the people's life. As early as 1836, a total abstinence movement had been begun in the South of Ireland by the Rev. Nicholas Dunscombe, a Church of England clergyman, the Rev. Richard Dowden, a Unitarian, and William Martin, a member of the Society of Friends. The last-named was the leading spirit of the movement; and he it was who induced Father Mathew to sign the total abstinence pledge at a public meeting in Cork, on April 10, 1838, and to promise the movement the full force of his influence and sympathy. This was the birthday of the total abstinence movement.

Let Archbishop Ireland, the Father Mathew of our own time, describe it. We quote from his great article in the *Catholic World*:—

"The story has been often told, but it is ever worthy of repetition. He had gathered around him in his humble school-room a group of friends. He spoke to them of the evils wrought by intemperance. 'Indeed,' he added, 'if

only one poor soul could be rescued from destruction by what we are now attempting, it would give glory to God, and be well worth all the trouble we could take. No person in health has any need of intoxicating drinks. My dear friends, you do not require them, nor do I require them—neither do I take them. After much reflection on the subject, I have come to the conviction that there is no necessity for the use of them by any one in good health; and I advise you all to follow my example. I will be the first to sign my name on the book which is on the table, and I hope we shall soon have it full.' Father Mathew then approached the table and, taking the pen, said: 'Here goes, in the name of God!' and signed as follows: 'Revd. Theobald Mathew, C. C., Cove Street, No. 1.'

"Cove Street, No. 1! Three years ago, guided by the esteemed Bishop of Cork, Doctor O'Callaghan, I turned thither my steps. It was to me a shrine most sacred. Thoughts of it had visited me on trans-Atlantic ground, and had impelled me on a certain day, which I will ever reckon among the happiest of my life, to repeat, in earnestness which must cease only on the grave's brink, the words of Father Mathew: 'Here goes, in the name of God!' I wished by the closest contact with the scenes amid which he had lived to freshen in my soul my resolution and gain new strength for it."

"Father Mathew, as revealed to us on that memorable day," continues Archbishop Ireland, "was a man of singular courage." This is the more evident as we recall that he had to contend not only against deep-seated evil custom—and this with a remedy unusual and unpopular—but even to set himself against the business interests of kindred and friends, who were engaged in brewing and distilling.

But he did not shrink from isolation. He was too sure of his mission, and too well convinced that in advocating it, his example should pave the way for his preaching.

He began his crusade in Cork. The people flocked to his sermons and took the pledge in thousands. He went from end to end of Ireland, and with equal success. He revolutionized the face of the country. In many places, public-houses and distilleries had to close for dearth of patronage. Temperance halls were opened. The pledged total abstainers of Ireland numbered several millions. The annual consumption of spirits dropped in Ireland from 12,295,000 gallons in 1839 to 6,485,443 in 1842; and the number of persons committed to jail from 12,049 to 9,875.

On March 28, 1842, his work received a tremendous impetus. Daniel O'Connell, then Lord Mayor of Dublin, publicly took the pledge from Father Mathew.

Father Mathew's work was for humanity. He pledged 600,000 in England and Scotland.

Then came the Irish famine of 1847-48, and he devoted all his energies to the temporal and spiritual relief of his stricken countrymen.

His rigorous fasting during the Lent of 1848 brought about an alarming attack of paralysis.

No sooner was he partially recovered, than he set out for America, where he travelled through twenty-five States and gave the pledge to hundreds of thousands, Protestants as well as Catholics.

He came to Boston, July 22, 1849, and had a public reception, not since exceeded in unanimity of admiration and enthusiasm. Twenty thousand people attended the public meeting on Boston Common that evening, Governor Briggs, Mayor Bigelow and Father Taylor, of the Baptist Bethel, being among the notable figures. He had a reception at Faneuil Hall on July 25, at which Hon. Josiah Quincy, Jr., presided. Father Mathew gave the pledge to 35,000 people in Boston alone, and to many more in the neighbouring cities and towns. He founded numerous total abstinence organizations, the only one of which now in existence and connected with the Archdiocesan Union of Boston is the Father Mathew Total Abstinence Society of East Cambridge. On Sept. 3, 1849, Father Mathew gave the pledge to 1,000 people in old St. John's, E. Cambridge, and on December 25, following, the society above-named was organized. Four of the charter members are still alive, and have kept the pledge, which they took at the great temperance apostle's