

# Great Evangelists and Temperance

By Victoria Grigg, M.A.

## VI. THEOBALD MATTHEW

I proposed to write on Thomas Chiniquy as the subject of my sixth article in this series; but, on thinking it over, felt that it would not be right to do so without first writing of the great man who did so much to influence him, namely Father Matthew. Yes; it was from the ranks of the Roman Catholic priesthood that there arose one who was inspired by a Quaker to take up in God's name, the cause of Temperance. Matthew was called the apostle of Temperance in Ireland; Chiniquy the apostle of Temperance in Canada.

Father Matthew as a young Capuchin friar, was a director of the House of Industry in Cork. It was at the urging of his colleague and friend William Martin, that in 1838, he held his first Temperance meeting in his own school-room in Cork, and then signed the pledge, saying, as he did so, "Here goes, in the name of the Lord." At that meeting, sixty persons followed his example, and this was the beginning of a tremendous crusade which was to influence thousands of people. A portrait of this great man shows a face handsome, intelligent and truly noble. Father Matthew's successes were won in the face of the bitterest opposition of most of his fellow-priests. Chiniquy relates how, when he felt afraid to venture on his own Temperance crusade, he wrote to Matthew for his advice and the help of his prayers. The Irish priest in reply, pressed him to begin the work in Canada, as he had done in Ireland, *relying on God, without paying any attention to the opposition of man.*

It is estimated that about 5,000 persons took the pledge in Cork within a few months of the beginning of the Temperance crusade. In a month after meetings in Limerick, Waterford and other places in Southern Ireland, nearly a quarter of a million people became total abstainers, and it is considered that his ministry in Ireland alone resulted in three million people taking the pledge. He was warned not to visit Ulster on account of the dislike of the Orangemen for priests, but on his first visit there the Orangemen came in Grand Procession to receive him. As Mr. A. M. Sullivan writes, "When Father Matthew saw the Orangemen's flag hung out at Cootehill on Church and Kirk he rightly appreciated the spirit of the display, and

called for three cheers for them. A Catholic clergyman calling for a cordial salutation of the Orange banner, and a Catholic assembly heartily responding, was something inconceivable. It had never occurred before in Ireland and I am afraid has never occurred since.

The effects of Father Matthew's Temperance were remarkable indeed. The consumption of spirits dropped from over twelve million gallons to five and a-half millions. Public houses decreased from 21,326 to 13,018. Assaults with attempts to murder, homicides, and such heavy offences dropped from 12,096 to 173 in three years. The Rev. William Wright describes a visit to Ireland in 1843, and states amongst other things: "On inspecting prisons in Dublin, I was informed one was closed and for sale; in another I saw upwards of one hundred cells vacant, and in other gaols a similar state of things. At the Police Station the men admitted that they had not half the employment they formerly had. Some 600 to 800 public houses had been closed. Magistrates had been obliged to appoint two days a week for Savings Banks instead of one, the deposits were coming in so quickly. It is now as common in Ireland to meet a poor man with a decent coat on his back as formerly it was rare. In Waterford it is estimated that there are upwards of £100,000 worth of value in clothes and furniture in the cottages of the working classes above what there was two years back."

During the whole of this campaign, Father Matthew was violently opposed by many, particularly of his own faith. He was threatened and slandered. He was accused of growing rich by the sale of Temperance medals, whereas he had contributed so heavily to the cause that he became bankrupt. Though he suffered, he was undeterred. In 1843 his visit to England resulted in thousands of pledged abstainers; in London alone, 70,000.

It was during a Temperance campaign in America that he met Thomas Chiniquy who says: "My best source of information and wisdom was from letters received from Father Matthew, and my personal interviews with him when he visited the United States."

He told Chiniquy never to rely too much on the excitement of the multitude,

and never to give the pledge without giving a complete course of lectures on the damning effects of intoxicating drinks. He said, "We must demonstrate to the people that these alcoholic drinks are absolutely destructive of their temporal as well as their eternal life."

Chiniquy says a profound impression was made on him when Father Matthew referred to the pain and sorrow he felt on account of the ridicule and drinking habits of his fellow-priests. Several took the pledge before their parishioners only to break it immediately.

The interview with Chiniquy took place in a hotel in Boston, and Father Matthew said that there the drinking habits of bishops and priests were such that he felt forced to withdraw from the bishop's palace and come quietly to the hotel. "In saying these last words," Chiniquy writes, "that good and noble man burst into a fit of convulsive sobs and tears. He concealed his face in his hands, and for nearly ten minutes could not utter a word. The spectacle of the desolation of a man whom God raised up so high, and so much blessed, and the tears of one who himself dried up so many tears, and brought so much joy and comfort to so many desolate homes, has been one of the most solemn lessons my God ever gave. For who had received more merited praises, and who had seen his own labours more blessed by God and man, than Father Matthew?"

The original Temperance medal in Cork bore on one side the pledge, and on the other a design which is very impressive. A man holding a banner labelled "Sobriety," and a woman holding a banner labelled "Domestic Comfort," stand on either side of a child bearing the letters "IHS" (Jesus the Saviour of men). Immediately above these letters is a lamb bearing a banner. The picture makes one think at once of the words, "The Son of God goes forth to war." At the feet of the man and woman are two little children. Surmounting the shield is a Cross, and above the Cross the words, "In hoc signo vinces" (In this sign you conquer). The whole design suggests absolute reliance on Christ in the keeping of the pledge.

Father Matthew said, "*The Temperance Cause is a cause in which we should all unite. It is the cause of our common humanity and the cause of God.*"

### MODERATION

What is moderation in the use of liquor anyway? Is it the constant slight use of alcoholic beverages? Is it an occasional slight use?

This thing is almost sure: that the constant "moderate" use of alcoholic beverages will probably become a greater use; either a greater use of quantity, or a greater use of absolute

alcohol by shifting from beer and wine to distilled spirits. Even the chronic effects of the long-term "slight use" of alcoholic beverages are certainly not fully known. These effects cannot be good.

As a social policy, the occasional "moderate" use of alcoholic beverages is more questionable for this reason, that it is comparatively easy to abstain

always, but it is difficult to say yes today and no to-morrow. Well-bred persons certainly do not on any social occasion press alcoholic beverages upon those who are known abstainers. But the man who tries to abstain occasionally or to restrict his consumption to only small amounts, is very much more liable to be subjected to social pressure.

—The Voice.