

FATHER MATHEW IN LONDON.

On Monday a great concourse of people assembled in the Commercial road East, to hear and see the Rev. Theobald Mathew, who had announced his intention of administering the total abstinence pledge in the ground lately consecrated by a Roman Catholic bishop, on the south side of the Commercial road, opposite the George Inn. A temporary platform had been erected for the various persons who intended to take part in the proceedings, and a few minutes before the arrival of Father Mathew it gave way with a loud crash, precipitating about fifty persons who were on it to the ground. This accident created great alarm; but, fortunately, no person was hurt, and the scaffold was soon put up again, and supported in a more substantial manner. At ten o'clock Father Mathew faced a metropolitan auditory for the first time. He was received with loud cheers, particularly by his countrymen, who assembled in great numbers. The Rev. Mr. Mathew is a gentleman about fifty years of age, of mild and expressive features. His unaffected manner and deportment and the simplicity of his style when addressing his hearers, appeared to make a great impression on everyone. There was an evident sincerity about all his words and actions, which spoke more to the feelings of his hearers than all the speeches, and their name was legion, uttered throughout the day. He was surrounded by the leading members of the various Temperance and Teetotal Societies in London. The poles supporting the platform were decorated with flags and banners, bearing appropriate inscriptions.

Father Mathew opened the proceedings by a short but expressive prayer, and then delivered an address, which was listened to with great attention, on the advantage of total abstinence from all intoxicating drinks, and the evils of intemperance. The first persons who presented themselves were a Roman Catholic fraternity called the Holy Guild, who came in procession to the ground, bearing crosses. The brothers and sisters of the fraternity, which has been established chiefly for charitable purposes, knelt down and repeated the words of the pledge after Father Mathew, in a loud voice. He then descended from the platform and gave them his blessing, and, after touching them all on the forehead, dismissed them. The same ceremony was repeated about twelve or fourteen times during the day. A batch, having been duly prepared by speeches from Earl Stanhope, Dr. Duley, Mr. Whitaker, and others, and lastly, by Father Mathew himself, knelt down and repeated the pledge after him, and after being touched by the reverend gentleman, were requested to depart and make way for others.

The police, under the direction of Inspector Rutt and Sergeant Parker, of the K division, greatly facilitated the arrangements and prevented much confusion.

Earl Stanhope and Father Mathew shook hands, and the noble lord addressed the multitude for nearly an hour, and said he had been a teetotaler for many years, and invited his hearers to follow his example. He declared his intention of publicly taking the pledge from Father Mathew, and warmly eulogized the rev. gentleman for his useful and patriotic exertions in Ireland, and expressed a fervent hope that his mission in England would be attended with similar results.

Father Mathew then called upon those who were anxious to come forward and take the pledge with Earl Stanhope to do so. A semicircle was formed, and 300 men and women knelt down and received the pledge. Earl Stanhope, who laboured under considerable agitation, was directly afterwards embraced by Father Mathew, who, in the enthusiasm of the moment, kissed his cheek. The noble earl smiled, and grasped Father Mathew's hand, exclaiming, "God bless you, sir." The delivery of speeches and the administration of the pledge were proceeded with till dusk, when Father Mathew left the ground, having previously announced his intention of attending in the same place for the same purpose every day this week.

About 3000 took the pledge during the day, one half of whom were Irish. From the appearance of many of them we should say the total abstinence pledge was very necessary. The conduct of the vast multitude was most orderly.

Early next morning the rev. gentleman resumed his labours in the Commercial road East. Earl Stanhope again attended, and remained on the platform addressing the people, and exhorting them to take the pledge of total abstinence from all intoxicating liquors, for nearly four hours. He was very warmly greeted by the multitude who, at his request, gave three times three cheers for Father Mathew.

The rev. gentleman addressed the people on the evils of intemperance in a very effective manner, and he related many anecdotes, some of a humorous, and others of a very tragical nature, which told well. He paid a high compliment to the London press for the fairness and candour with which it had reported his proceedings, and at the desire of a gentleman on the platform, three cheers were given for the newspapers. At the request of his countrymen, Father Mathew repeated the words of the pledge in the Irish language. Soldiers, sailors, mechanics, and their wives and children, professional men, and several ladies and gentlemen, were among those who took the pledge during the day.

Among those who took the pledge were many with black eyes and bruised faces, who appeared to have been recently making great sacrifices to Bacchus. They were exhorted by Earl Stanhope and Father Mathew not to quarrel with any one again, and not to violate the pledge, and they solemnly promised not to make beasts of themselves any more. At sunset the proceedings terminated for the day, Father Mathew retired from the ground, but not before he had passed another warm eulogium on the newspapers for the fairness with which they had reported his proceedings, and the kind manner in which he had been spoken of. He felt deeply the obligation he was under to the London newspapers, and it would stimulate him to further exertions in the cause of temperance and morality. Father Mathew seems to practice as well as to preach total abstinence. During the twelve hours he was on the ground he never tasted food or drink, and he was hard at work talking and administering during the whole of the time. His speeches were imbued with kindly feeling, and he took great pains to convince his hearers that he did not wish to advance the interests of any particular party either in religion or politics, declaring that the Protestants in Ireland, to great numbers of whom he had administered the pledge, had received him with the same cordiality as the members of his own church. Father Mathew has won "golden opinions from all sorts of men" by his affability and simple manners, and he is an example in his own person that cheerfulness can be reconciled with total abstinence from all intoxicating drinks. There were upwards of 60,000 persons on the ground during the day.

In No. 39 of this journal we had the gratification of giving a portrait of this truly great man, and in honour of his visit to London we have here presented the two annexed illustrations, which we are satisfied will not be unacceptable to our readers. The personal appearance of Father Mathew is remarkable. The following interesting and graphic account of it is taken from the excellent work of Mrs. Hall on "Ireland."

No one who sees the Rev. Mr. Mathew will hesitate to believe that he has been stimulated by pure benevolence to the work he has undertaken. The expression of his countenance is peculiarly mild and gracious; his manner is persuasive to a degree, simple and easy, and humble without a shadow of affectation, and his voice is low and musical – "such as moves men." A man more naturally fitted to obtain influence over a people, easily led and proverbially swayed by the affections, we have never encountered. No man has borne his honours more meekly; encountered opposition with greater gentleness and forbearance; or disarmed hostility with weapons better suited to a Christian. His age is somewhat above fifty, but he looks younger; his frame is strong, evidently calculated to endure great

fatigue, and his aspect is that of established health – a serviceable illustration of the practical value of his system. He is somewhat above the middle size; his features are handsome as well as expressive. Our brief interview with him confirmed the favourable impression of his character we had obtained from a knowledge of the benefits derived from his labours; and we left him with fervent thanks to God, that a man so qualified to sway a multitude had so wisely, so nobly, and so virtuously applied his powers and directed the energies of his marvelously active mind, feeling how dangerous it might have proved if they had been exerted for evil and not for good.

On Thursday the Rev. Mr. Mathew resumed his interesting and arduous proceedings. At nine o' clock the ground the scene of his labours (which has lately been consecrated as a Catholic cemetery) was crowded to a very great extent. The rev. gentleman, however, did not arrive until shortly after ten o'clock, when, on ascending the platform from which he addressed the assemblage, he was most enthusiastically applauded. During the entire day there certainly could not have been less than 40,000 persons on the ground, the greater part of whom were drawn together through curiosity to see the great Apostle of Temperance, and to witness the administering of the pledge. In the second batch that came forward to take the pledge were several policemen, a recruiting sergeant of the 22nd Regiment, and a Highland piper, dressed in full costume. The rev. gentleman having made some appropriate observations, concluded by administering the pledge.

Before the close of the proceedings twenty-five batches came forward, each consisting of about sixty persons, making in all 1500. There were several Protestant clergymen present, and also a great number of foreigners. The attendance would have been considerably greater, but for the unpropitious state of the weather, as it rained in torrents during the greater part of the day.

[Taken from *Illustrated London News*, Vol. III, 1843, pp 85-86]