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THE CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY OF IRELAND

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The Kingdom of
MATT TALBOT

A DUBLIN LABOURER: 1856-1925.
BY SIR JOSEPH GLYNN, LL.D.

*heaven was
Promised not to
the sensible and
the Educated But
to such as have
the Spirit of*

DUBLIN.
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little children

The author desires it to be understood that unless where he expressly states that the Church or the Holy See recognised the truth of miracles or other supernatural manifestations referred to in the following pages, he claims no credence for them beyond what the available historical evidence may warrant.

Nihil Obstat :

JOSEPH P. NEWTH, C.C.,
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THE COVER

The writing in facsimile on the cover is reproduced from one of Matt Talbot's transcriptions.

MATT TALBOT

A DUBLIN LABOURER

“ And out of souls like this will Heaven be built
And Holy Cities be peopled for the Lord.”

—Crossland

On Trinity Sunday, June 7th, 1925, at about 9.30., a man was seen to fall in Granby Lane on the way to St. Saviour's Church, Dominick Street, Dublin. On being taken to Jervis Street Hospital he was found to be dead and was laid in the mortuary, where shortly afterwards one of the Sisters of Mercy came with a nurse to prepare the corpse for burial. On removing the clothes she found a cart chain tied twice around the body, and hung with religious medals; around one arm was a lighter chain, around the other, the cord of St. Francis; around one leg a chain similar to that which was around the arm; around the other, a rope was tied tightly.

The body was scrupulously clean, though the chains were rusty and had sunk into the skin. Later on the Sister heard a little of the story of the man whose body she had prepared for burial, Matt Talbot, and this story is what the writer proposes to tell, so far as one can pierce the veil which shrouds every interior Soul in its intercourse with God.

The facts related in this little life have been obtained directly from the nearest living relatives of Matt Talbot, and from those who knew him intimately for over 30 years in his work and in his devotions. Nothing has been recorded that has not been tested and proved, and if the result is to show that we have been privileged to live in the time of one who, by his sanctity and his austerities, rivalled our ancient Irish Saints, then let us thank God Who has raised to such high state a poor, unlettered labouring man who lived and prayed in a Dublin tenement room.

CHAPTER I.
WHO HE WAS

Matt Talbot was born in the year 1856, of working people, and was baptised in the Pro-Cathedral, Dublin. He attended the Christian Brothers' Schools in North Richmond Street and left at a very early age and went to work. As a boy he was as mischievous as most boys of his age, but, while his brothers generally suffered the penalties of the joint misdeeds, one of which consisted of selling the family pig, Matt by his cleverness generally got off. Far from showing signs of the holiness which characterised his manhood and later life, he became very much addicted to drink, and spent his money in the public house instead of on his home. His mother, in after years, used to tell how he sometimes sold the boots off his feet for drink and came home in his stockings. Thus he continued until he reached the age of 25, when, one Saturday night, he suddenly announced to his mother his intention of taking the pledge. She was not greatly impressed by his sudden resolution, but wished him "God Speed" and the grace to persevere. He went to Clonliffe College, where he took the total abstinence pledge for three months, intending, as he afterwards told his mother, to break it when the time was up. At the end of the period he renewed it for a year, and then for life. Eleven years later, the Rev. Dr. Keane, who had first administered it, was able to congratulate him on being able to keep a total abstinence pledge, and was pleased to hear that it was he himself who had been privileged to be God's instrument in a notable reformation of life. Matt related the story at home with great delight.

After leaving Burke's, in the Lotts, his first job, Matt worked for some years in Pemberton's, and finally at the age of 37, went to T. and C. Martin at the North Wall, where he remained until his health broke down in 1923. While his mother lived he resided with her, and later took a room in Rutland Street, for which he paid 2s. 3d. a week.

He never married. While employed at Pemberton's he was sent to work on a job in the residence of a Protestant clergyman. The latter had a Catholic cook who was a good,

pious girl. She observed the holiness of the young builder's labourer, and he was attracted by her piety. The girl suggested marriage, and stated that she possessed considerable savings which would enable them to set up a comfortable home. Matt at once began a Novena that he might be enlightened as to the Will of God on this matter, and received a reply in prayer that he was to remain single. He then informed the girl of his decision, and never afterwards wavered in his resolution not to marry.

His life of penance began with his total abstinence pledge, and continued with increasing austerity for over forty years. During that time until the increase due to the Great War, his wages, were those of a labouring man varying from 15s. to 19s. a week.

A gentleman who knew him intimately for over 25 years thus describes his appearance in his latter years: "There was nothing striking or impressive in his appearance as one met him on his daily rounds. He was a very commonplace type, poorly clad, but clean. Somewhat below the middle height, of slight and wiry build, he walked rapidly in long strides, and loose, swinging gait. His bearing was quite simple and natural, with nothing 'put on.' His look, as he moved along, indicated more of recollection than preoccupation. Meeting him at close quarters one was at once struck by the high forehead and rounded temples. His eyes were large, with drooping lids which gave a serious and thoughtful expression to the face. In conversation, when interested in his subject, he became lively and animated, showing emotion and warmth, which at times reached fierce indignation. In general conversation he would impress one as a shrewd, practical man, alert and keen, with good judgment and commonsense. Although a plain and rough-spoken man, he was a most interesting personality." His sister states that he was always good-humoured, and had a sweet voice, and was fond of singing hymns in his own room.

One of the Brothers attached to St. Francis Xavier's Church, Gardiner Street, who knew him very well, states that he was rather a silent man. He never spoke to the Brothers unless spoken to, in which case he discussed things frankly and openly.

CHAPTER II.

HOW HE SPENT HIS DAY

Every day of his life for many years he rose at 2 a.m. He had slept for about 14 years on a plank bed, with a wooden pillow. The plank was covered with a sheet to conceal it, and over that was a half blanket, which was all his covering except when the weather was very cold. In that case he permitted his sister to add a few sacks, but no more bed-clothes.

From 2 a.m. to 4 a.m. he prayed on his knees, on the bed, with his arms outstretched. At 4 o'clock he left his bed, and, having dressed, resumed his devotions until it was time to go to Mass. When there was a 5 a.m. Mass at Gardiner Street he attended it, but after this Mass was discontinued, he was always at the Church at 5 o'clock, waiting for the door to be opened at 5.30. While waiting he knelt at the railings, whether the weather was wet or fine. He knelt on his bare knees on the stones, having cut the knees of his trousers lengthways, so that by pulling his coat around him he concealed the fact from all except the most observant. When the door opened he knelt on the threshold and kissed the ground, and then went to the High Altar. Before first Mass, which in later years was at 6.15 he went round the Stations of the Cross on his bare knees, again concealing the fact by pulling his overcoat closely around him. He received Holy Communion during Mass, and he did not remain long after Mass had finished. He always knelt upright, did not use a prayer book, never rose from his knees, even during the Gospel, and never raised his eyes. On leaving the church he did not look to the right or left, but walked straight out. There was nothing in his demeanour to attract attention save his extraordinary spirit of recollection. After his illness, in 1923, he changed his place in the church, and knelt at St. Joseph's Altar. On leaving the church he returned to his room in Rutland Street, where he heated cocoa prepared the previous evening by his sister, ate some bread, and left for his work at T. and C. Martin's. If he had time he paid

a short visit to a Church on his way to the North Wall.

Two of his foremen, who knew him for thirty years said Matt was never late for his work. Only on one occasion did one of these miss Talbot, and then it was because the latter had not heard a lorry coming into the yard and had remained in a small shed to which he used to retire during slack periods of the day in order to pray. In past years it had been not uncommon to hear bad language in the yard. Talbot never allowed such language to go unrebuked, and when the work in hand was finished, he would, while waiting for a lorry to arrive, retire into the shed already referred to, and go on his knees to make reparation for what he had heard. If any of the men laughed at coarse jokes, he would, after the day's work was ended, call one or other of them aside and point out that while no one could avoid listening to what had passed, one should not laugh at what might be said that was out of place. Next day he would probably bring some pious book, and lend it to the man to whom he had spoken. At first the men jeered Matt, but after a little time his strong character and absolute sincerity impressed all, and it was an unheard of thing for anyone to use bad language in the yard in which he worked.

During the dinner hour he did not go home, but spent as much of it as he could in prayer. When in good health he did not bring lunch with him, but later on he brought a slice of bread cut in two, which he ate while the men had their dinner. Sometimes the other men pressed him to eat some of their food, and he generally did so, as he had made a rule not to persist in refusing lest it should attract attention to his fasting.

During slack minutes of the day he would speak to men whom he knew well on incidents in the lives of the Saints he had read. He interested them by these stories, and always lead the conversation round to holy things. He did this quite simply and without the least self-consciousness. God was always in his mind and he had to speak of Him. On one occasion he had got into an argument with his foreman and spoke so strongly on the subject under discussion that the foreman thought he had passed the bounds of respect

and said so. They parted without further words, but a day or two later Matt went to the foreman and said Our Lord had told him he should beg pardon for what he had said, and that he had come to do so.

His attitude towards his employers and towards his fellow-workers was one of exceeding strictness. He sympathised with all workers in their efforts to improve their positions in life, and could speak strongly on the question of the rights and duties of employers and workmen. When a cargo of timber had to be unloaded within a limited time and during the ordinary working hours of the day, so that the ship might catch the outgoing tide, the men were entitled to a bonus of two shillings each, provided they had the ship unloaded in time. If they failed they got nothing for the extra labour. On the first occasion on which Talbot was sent to this work, he did not call at the office for the 2/- bonus, and, on being questioned by the foreman on the following day as to his non-appearance, he replied that he scrupled taking the money for the extra labour, as there were many hours in the week when he was idle waiting for the lorries to arrive, and that the idle hours should be set against the extra work. The foreman replied that he could not upset his accounts for Talbot's scruples, and paid him the two shillings. Afterwards the foreman had to bring the money to Matt, who accepted it as a gift, but declined to claim it as a right. The incident is quoted to show the scrupulous sense of justice he possessed. This sense of justice he carried into all his relations with his employers and fellow-workers. When labour troubles developed, and the workers took counsel as to their future procedure, he did not take part in the discussions, but did whatever was agreed upon by the majority of the workers. He declined, however, to take part in public demonstrations during a strike, or to demand strike pay. If the strike pay was tendered to him he accepted it, but did not consider himself entitled to it as of right.

On leaving work at 5.30 p.m., he returned to his room where his sister had his meal prepared. This will be referred to when dealing with his fasting. On entering his room he removed his coat, knelt and kissed the Crucifix,

and then ate his meal kneeling at the table. When he had finished, his sister tidied up the room and left him alone. He did not rise from his knees, but at once began his devotions, which continued until he retired to bed about 10.30 p.m.

CHAPTER III.

HIS DEVOTIONS

It is not easy to give a really constructive account of his Devotions. We have seen in the last chapter that practically from 2 o'clock in the morning until nearly 5 o'clock he was on his knees in his room, and we know that in the evening, certainly not later than 6.30, he resumed his prayers until 10.30 or 11 o'clock, again on his knees.

Sunday was with him a very full day. Before his illness he remained in the Church from 5.30 in the morning until the Benediction after the last Mass, which usually ended about 1.30 p.m. During that long period, save while he went to the Altar to receive Holy Communion, he never rose from his knees.

The Sunday morning was spent either in the Jesuit Church, Gardiner Street; the Dominican Church, Dominick Street, or the Carmelite Church, Clarendon Street, according to the Feast of the day. During this time he never used a prayer-book, so that his prayer was either mental or a repetition of vocal prayer. He was back in his room about 2 o'clock, when he took what was often the only meal of the day. Sunday evening again found him at his Sodality in Gardiner Street.

He had a number of regular devotions. After his devotion to our Blessed Lord he had a very special devotion to the Mother of God, and in pursuance of this devotion he recited every day the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, the Fifteen Mysteries of the Rosary, the Dolour Beads and the Beads of the Immaculate Conception. Other special devotions which he had every day were the Beads of the Holy Ghost, the Beads of St. Michael, the Beads of the Sacred Heart, and the Chaplet for the Souls in Purgatory. He was

a member of the Third Order of St. Francis, and recited the prayers belonging to that Order. He attended the meeting of the Third Order at the Church of the Franciscans on Merchant's Quay. It is usual to say one round of the Beads for the deceased members of the Order whose names are announced at the monthly meeting. These he said before leaving the Church, and they were always in addition to the Fifteen Mysteries which he recited every day. He had a number of Litanies taken from the various books of devotion, which he recited during the long period of prayer in the evening, and numbers of his most used books are the little Manuals of special devotions suitable for various times of the year. He performed Novenas for all the principal Feasts, and here and there through his little books are found notes giving the dates on which certain Novenas were to begin, such as, for example, that to his Guardian Angel. These Novenas often overlapped. One little leaflet has, in his own writing a note of the beginning of the Novena to St. Michael on the 21st September, and to his Guardian Angel on the 24th September. Every First Thursday he did the Eucharistic Hour.

A little book in the possession of the writer is entirely devoted to the Holy Ghost, and seems to have been in constant use.

Matt was constantly receiving requests for prayers, and these were invariably complied with. That these prayers were efficacious is shown by the notes he received thanking him, and stating that the requests had been granted. Two or three very remarkable incidents have been related to the writer in connection with answers to prayers.

The gentleman whose description of Talbot has already been quoted, states that on one occasion he questioned Talbot as to whether he got any direct spiritual message. Matt replied that he could only recollect one. A man whom he knew well, and who lived a careless life, died without the Sacraments. Talbot stated that he was awakened during the night by a voice telling him to get up and pray for the dying man. He did so, and ascertained next day that this man had died during the night previous, about the very time that he was praying for him.

A person who knew him well states that quite a number of temporary favours were got through his prayers. One was of a very remarkable nature. Every effort to settle a temporary matter had failed when Talbot was asked to pray for a successful issue. Within a fortnight of his prayers the matter was most unexpectedly solved in a thoroughly satisfactory manner. Another friend who was involved in a family quarrel succeeded in settling his quarrel through Talbot's prayers.

One very remarkable conversion which was publicly noticed among all Talbot's friends, and about which the man involved made no secret whatever, was that of an artisan who was 30 years from the Sacraments. Meeting Talbot one Friday evening, he discussed the question of temperance with him, and informed Talbot that he had not taken a drink for a long number of years. Talbot asked him abruptly what about his soul, and he answered that he had neither attended Mass nor the Sacraments for 30 years. Talbot spoke very clearly and definitely to this man about the danger he was in. He then made an appointment with him for the following evening, when he brought him to the Holy Cross College to the Rev. Dr. Keane, to whom he made his Confession. Without further delay he brought his friend to St. Francis Xavier's, Gardiner Street, and induced him to join the Confraternity of the Sacred Heart, of which this man afterwards became a most prominent member. Often when he met Talbot afterwards he would stop and bless him for his charity towards him. He was subsequently killed in an accident in the course of his work.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT WAS FOUND IN HIS PRAYER BOOK

When we read of men who occupied great places in the world, the things which interest us most are the little details of their lives, which reveal the inner soul of the man; the little personal touches, which make him live again before our eyes; the various little acts and thoughts which speak more eloquently than anything else of the virtues which

lie hidden beneath the surface which only the world has seen. Matt Talbot did not occupy any place in the eyes of the world, but every little thing he possessed told the story of the place he occupied in the eyes of God. A little prayer book given to the writer as a souvenir was "A Manual of Devotion in Honour of the Holy Ghost," by Father John Mary, a Capuchin. On the inside the cover was written in a very unformed hand: "the feast of the 7 Joys B.V.M. 22nd August, 1915, I Matt Talbot was present at 21 Masses." On a subsequent page but written a week earlier, he notes that on the 15th August, 1915, the Feast of the Assumption, which fell on a Sunday that year, he was present at 21 Masses. These evidently constituted a record which deserved a special note. The pages are thumbed and soiled by his fingers. There is a scrap of paper with a note from something heard or read—"at present the human body is an animal body inasmuch as to preserve its life on this earth so it is (necessary) to nourish it with earthly food." The word "necessary" in brackets is not in the original. In the same page is a leaflet on St. Benedict's Medal. The next scrap is from a child's copy book written on one side, on the other side he has written "Jesus is with us cease." Then came his card of membership of St. Joseph's Union. On page 68, marking the Exercise of Reparation for Sins against the Holy Ghost, is a leaflet of prayers for monthly meetings of the Third Order of St. Francis. Next came the Novena for the Golden Jubilee of the Apostleship of Prayer, followed a few pages later by a page from Devotions for May—17th day—"Devotions to the Blessed Virgin." The Litany of Ireland's Saints is there, trimmed to fit the page—a form of the Morning Offering, a leaflet of the Arch-Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament, a Novena in Honour of Our Lady of Dolours and her picture, a leaflet called "A Little Talk with Jesus," and written on it "21st September the Novena to St. Michael and all the Angels, the 29th is the Feast." On the back is a note of "The Novena of my Guardian Angel begins on the 21st September, the 2nd October, Feast of the Holy Angels." On the same page is the Litany of Our Lady of Montligeon and a Picture of the Apparition of Our Lady at La Salette. An-

other scrap of paper has the following:—"Our Lord appeared to St. Gertrude, pale, weary, bleeding and dirt-stained and said 'open your heart, my daughter, for I want to go in and lie down. I am weary of these days of sin.'" With it is a prayer for Ireland to be recited during June. Another scrap—"Oh Virgin I only ask three things—the Grace of God, the Presence of God, the Benediction of God." From the same bit of paper was torn another scrap with this—"Perfect happiness consists in full activity of a perfect nature, the Angels have it."

All through it are leaflets dealing with various Devotions, or favourite hymns torn from a hymn book. These hymns he used sing when at his devotion in his room. The little book itself was not a prayer book for use in the Church, for he did not use a prayer book at Mass; it was rather for private use, and consisted exclusively of devotion to the Holy Ghost.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT HE READ

This leads us naturally to his spiritual reading which occupied part of the time he spent on his knees every evening. It is stated that he read well, and that his memory was so good that he could remember all the particulars of the lives of the Saints which he had read and giving correctly the dates of their births, deaths, canonizations, etc. In considering his little library we must remember that he was a man who had barely learned to read and write at school. For that reason as well as for the reason that inspires all men of prayer, he never began reading without first invoking the Holy Ghost to enlighten him.

The writer has had the privilege of examining his little library. It consists of a trunk filled to the top with spiritual books, amongst which volumes dealing with the Interior Life predominated. Looking through them it is easy to trace the progress of his Soul from its beginning in the spiritual life to the full stature of the soul of a man of prayer. He had filled his mind with the lives of the Saints from Butler's great work. Every new addition to the Calendar found its

way into his little collection, as could be seen from the large number of publications of the Messenger and C.T.S. series of booklets. History is represented by Newman's work, but the pride of place was given to books on Our Blessed Lady and on Devotion to Our Lord. Two books on the Blessed Virgin which he possessed show how deeply he revered and loved our Holy Mother—one was the History of True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin, by Blessed Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort; the other, "The Mystical City of God," from the writings of Mary Agreda. The latter he held in particular esteem, and refused to part with it, though most generous in lending and giving away spiritual books. Several of his books deal with Devotion to Our Blessed Lord, viz.: "The Sufferings of Our Lord Jesus Christ," by Father Thomas of Jesus: "Imitation of the Sacred Heart," "Our Divine Saviour," by the Bishop of Newport: "The School of Christ," by Père Grou, S.J.: "Christ Among Men," by L'Abbé Sortillange; "All for Jesus," by Father Faber. Amongst books on the Interior Life were Father Faber's "Spiritual Conferences," "Spiritual Instructions," by Ven. Blossius: "Manual for Interior Souls," by Père Grou; "Introduction to the Devout Life," by St. Francis de Sales, and "The Science of the Soul" to name only a few. When looking through the box of books the writer was handed four small volumes which he was told were those Matt Talbot had in daily use. They were the Manuals for the various devotions which he practised. They were very old, all thumbed and discoloured, and held together by rubber bands or with twine. The original covers had come off and had been replaced by black canvas coverings over the old boards. The leaves were loose, and they had all the appearance of having seen many long years of use. Like the Manual of Devotion to the Holy Ghost already mentioned, they were filled with pictures and scraps of paper, on which extracts from his books had been copied. These scraps are of immense interest, and were often portion of a paper on which were measurements of timber in a bold, clerkly hand, quite different from his own laboured hand. When we remember that he worked in a timber yard we understand how he came by

bits of paper with such measurements on them. He loved his books, and when he spoke to others he generally brought the conversation round to holy things, and then he told his listeners incidents in the lives of the Saints out of some book which he had lately read. So he stored his mind with the Science of the Saints and learned from them how to follow in the footsteps of his Master.

CHAPTER VI.

HIS FASTS AND MORTIFICATIONS

We have to go back to the early Irish Saints to find the equal of the ordinary fasts done by Matt Talbot. On Sunday, outside Lent and the month of June, he ate a meal on his return from the Church about 2 p.m. If this meal was fairly substantial he did not eat again that day, but if it were light he took tea and bread about 6 p.m., prior to leaving for his Sodality Meeting. On Monday he generally took dry bread and black tea. Tuesday, if not the vigil of a Feast or if the season was not Lent or the month of June, he took a breakfast of cocoa with bread and butter and a dinner of little meat. Lunch he seldom took until his health broke down, when he took a slice of bread in his pocket to eat during the dinner hour. On Wednesday he took no meat, but might, occasionally, take a little butter. Every Saturday he fasted on dry bread and black tea in honour of Our Lady. On the Vigil of every Feast Day he black-fasted, and during the entire period of Lent took no meat, butter or milk. During June he black-fasted on the same meagre fare in honour of the Sacred Heart. He, certainly, at one time, also performed the Franciscan Fasts of the Third Order, but the writer has not been able to get positive information as to whether he continued to observe them after their abrogation by Pope Leo XIII, though the probabilities are all in favour of his having done so. On Sundays during the periods of his black-fasts he would, perhaps, take butter on his bread. As he found it most difficult to swallow dry bread, he used, on some occasions, to get his sister to boil a whiting, in the sauce

of which he dipped his bread, but he did not eat the fish, which his sister took away. At other times, to save expense, he would ask her to bring up a little sauce in which she had boiled fish for her own family dinner, and this he would use with his bread. His sister states that he never ate a full meal in his own house. One of his friends who knew of his decision not to refuse food if pressed upon him, sometimes took advantage of this knowledge and kept him to tea when he called on her. He frequently complained to her that it really was a mortification to have to eat, but he was bound by his own decision. Another friend who was not aware either of his severe fasts or his decisions about not refusing food, sometimes kept him to tea, when he visited him for the purpose of getting the loan of spiritual books. On such occasions Talbot made no remark, but partook heartily of the meal put before him. To realise what such fasting meant we must remember that he did a strenuous day's work and was an ordinary labouring man every day of the week, Sunday excepted.

Not content with mortifying his body by fasting from food, he gave up tobacco which after he had become a total abstainer from intoxicating drink he continued to use. He had not read a newspaper for many years, and even the placards he did not look at. So incurious was he that the anti-conscription campaign had gone on for several months before he heard of it from one of his friends. Other matters he learned of through the conversations of his fellow-workers in the yard, and sometimes he wrote down on one of his little scraps of paper the information which he had gathered. When he spoke of these affairs to his friends he gave them the idea that he was repeating what he had heard from others without having any view of the subject himself.

Some 12 or 14 years before his death he chanced upon a copy of "True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin," by Blessed Grignon de Montfort. There he read of the Slaves of Mary who wore chains in her honour. It was then he procured the chains which he constantly wore ever afterwards until his death, with the exception apparently of the period when he was ill in the Mater Misericordiae Hospital in 1923, and

when from motives of humility he removed them prior to entering the hospital. At first he wore the principal chain around his shoulders, but, as he found this interfered with his work of carrying planks of timber on his shoulders—the planks drove the chains into his flesh—he transferred the chain to his waist. He slept in his chains on a plank bed, with a wooden pillow. The bed, as has already been stated was covered with a sheet to conceal the timber, and over this was a half blanket, which was all the bedclothes he allowed except on the coldest nights, when his sister sometimes placed a few sacks on the bed to cover him. His pillow was a piece of pitch pine 18 inches by 11½ inches and rounded at the edges. In his latter years his face had become numb and his hearing impaired from the hard wood.

In the Church, as we have seen, he invariably knelt perfectly erect, even during the reading of the Gospel and Creed, so that he did not get the relief of his limbs which standing up would give him. A person who remonstrated with him for this and who said he would injure himself and thus incapacitate himself for work, was answered quite frankly that he would do a great deal more for God if he could.

He had a very great admiration for Saints who had performed extraordinary penances, and spoke of them with open admiration. His favourite description of Saint Teresa, Saint Mary of Egypt, and other women saints, was "they were great girls."

Sometimes when speaking to his sister of the great grace he had got in turning from a life such as he had led as a young man, he would always add: "It was God Who did it all. I have no credit for any of it." He was always afraid lest he should appear to be boasting when he spoke openly to her of holy things.

He was so full of the love of God that he could not hide his feelings, and this on one or two occasions caused uneasiness to his friends lest it should lead to spiritual pride. One of them spoke to him openly on the point and reminded him of the danger that existed for a man who had been so highly gifted with the spirit of prayer, lest he should feel any self-satisfaction in it. He listened without comment,

and then answered that he could never think of the great Saints and feel pride in what he had done. He afterwards referred to this conversation to show that he had not forgotten it. This friend thought that if there were any want of recitance, it was the result of a strong character which did not fear to speak openly of God's gifts. Another friend mentioned the matter to a priest who answered that the greatest hymn of praise in the Gospel was the Magnificat, which was the composition of the humblest of all women, Our Blessed Mother, and that it required very real humility to speak so openly of the action of God in one's soul.

In speaking of Matt Talbot's many fasts and mortifications one naturally asks: "Were these done under direction?" and "What has his spiritual directors to say to it all?" It is not believed that he had a spiritual director in the ordinary sense. He went to Confession once a month, and usually at Clonliffe College or the Parish Church. He was shy of speaking to priests, so much so that the Spiritual Directors of the Men's Confraternity at the Jesuit Church, Gardiner Street, and of the Third Order at the Franciscan Church, Merchants' Quay, did not know him by name and could not recall him. A lay friend to whom the writer applied for information stated that Matt Talbot revealed his interior life to very few and to no one fully. Two priests knew him intimately, but both are dead. One was the Rev. Father James Walsh, S.J., and the other the Right Rev. Monsignor Hickey, D.D., who, during his long connection with Holy Cross College, Clonliffe, knew Matt Talbot very intimately. Monsignor Hickey often visited Talbot in his little room and spent considerable time talking with him. Those who were privileged to know the simple, saintly character of Monsignor Hickey cannot but feel convinced that he knew all about Talbot's life and helped him by his advice and guidance in the regulation of his spiritual exercises.

CHAPTER VII

HIS CHARITY

Towards his fellowmen, Matt Talbot's attitude was one of widespread charity. While his mother lived he sup-

ported her out of his scanty wages and had something over for the poor. When she died he lived, prior to the Great War, on six shillings and subsequently on ten shillings a week, and gave away the rest. He subscribed to all the special collections made in the Confraternity, giving at times a substantial sum, but so unostentatiously that, as the writer has pointed out, the Spiritual Director who received the alms was not even told his name by the donor. The Chinese Mission appealed very strongly to him and he subscribed very generously towards its funds. Reference has already been made to a dispute he had with one of the foremen in the yard in which he was employed. This had reference to the collection then being made for the Chinese Mission, and Matt Talbot stated that the foreman should subscribe more largely and said that he, who was only a labouring man, had given £30 a year towards it. This was not said with the idea of boasting, but rather as a stimulus to the others to go and do likewise. The writer has tried to verify this statement. His sister stated that Matt had told her he had "finished three priests and was at the fourth." By this he meant that he had sent three sums of £30, that being the stipend for a yearly burse, in instalments, and that he was completing the fourth stipend when he got ill in 1923. A friend through whom some of the money was sent did not know the earlier sums and had information only about smaller sums which he had received from Talbot. A reference to the authorities at St. Columban's brought more information, but only from September, 1921, when a card index was started, and it became possible to see at a glance the subscriptions of each individual without having to examine all the books from the beginning. It is impossible, therefore, except at an expenditure of considerable time which would be quite unprofitable, to trace the donations sent by Matt Talbot prior to the institution of the card index. From September, 1921, to June, 1923, his card records the receipt of £24 by the Chinese Mission. This would bear out his sister's statement that he had nearly finished the cost of a fourth student when his health broke down in May, 1923. It is a wonderful record, all the more wonderful when it is borne in mind that many other charities

benefited by his generosity. It may be safely affirmed that all his wages, except about ten shillings a week which he paid for his rent and ascetic maintenance, and a weekly premium for burial expenses, was spent on charity.

CHAPTER VIII.

HIS ILLNESS AND DEATH

In May, 1923, Matt Talbot first complained of illness. A friend gave him a letter of introduction to a member of the Medical Staff of the Mater Misericordiae Hospital. He was at once admitted to the hospital, as it was found that he had heart disease and required rest and treatment. He must have removed his chains before entering the hospital, as the Sisters of Mercy state that he did not wear them while under treatment. He was remembered in the hospital as the man who prayed with such devotion and recollection, and who had a habit of praying aloud, a habit probably acquired in his own little room where he was alone and could pray as he wished. He was in the hospital for quite a long period, and when he left he continued to attend the outpatients' Department. From the 11th May, 1923, to 6th April, 1925, he was totally incapable of work, as during that period, except for the period 17th August, 1923, to 3rd September, 1923, he was in receipt of sickness and disablement benefit under the National Health Insurance Acts. He apparently tried to resume work in August, 1923, on his discharge from hospital, but broke down and had to resume treatment.

From 11th May, 1923, to 25th November, 1923, he received 15/- a week sickness benefit from the Builders' Labourers' Union, of which he was a member. On the 25th November, 1923, he had drawn his full twenty-six weeks' sickness benefit, and from that date he received disablement benefit at the rate of 7/6 per week. This entire period was one of great privation. He, who had been so charitable to others, found himself with only seven shillings and sixpence a week to pay for his lodgings, his food, and his weekly subscription to a burial fund, not to mention fire and light. His friends, who would have gladly helped him, found it difficult to

persuade him to accept assistance. One thing may be mentioned now that he is dead, and to reveal the incident is for the glory of God. In Christmas week, 1923, an anonymous donor left a sum of £20 in the central office of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Dublin, with a request that it be expended before Christmas Day on the poor. A member of the Society, who knew Matt Talbot intimately, asked for a pound for "a poor, holy man," without revealing his name, and received it. The donor of the £20, if he or she reads this, will rejoice that some of his gift reached such worthy hands, and the members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul will rejoice that they were privileged to relieve a hidden saint, who by his prayers will repay them a thousand fold for their act of charity. It was only when Matt Talbot died that the member who made the appeal on his behalf told the tale.

In April, 1925, Matt felt that he could resume work, though really he was still very ill. He said to a friend that he could not stand the idleness and would try to do some work. Accordingly, on April 17th he resumed his work in the timber yard, and continued there until his sudden death on Trinity Sunday, June 7th, 1925. During his prolonged illness he was compelled to modify his Sunday exercises. He went to the Church as usual at 5.30 a.m., but returned for breakfast at about 8.30 a.m., as he was unable to stand the prolonged fast until 2 o'clock, which he had done every Sunday for a long number of years. After breakfast he returned to the Church and remained there until about 2 p.m. He probably resumed the wearing of his chains on his discharge from hospital, as, when found on his body after death, they were rusty and had marked his flesh. On Trinity Sunday he was returning to St. Saviour's Church, Dominick Street, after breakfast, when he dropped dead in Granby Lane, being then in his 70th year.

He was buried in Glasnevin from St. Francis Xavier's Church, Upper Gardiner Street, on the Feast of Corpus Christi.

The foregoing facts have been set down without any exaggeration. In fact, the writer has been at pains not to idealize his subject, not to set down anything which could

not be substantiated from the testimony of reliable witnesses. The facts as they appear to the writer were so wonderful that he considered a bare recital of them would suffice to show our people that there had lived in their midst a holy man, whose life for 43 years can be compared only with those of certain great penitents whose names were afterwards enrolled amongst those of the Canonized Saints. No one may anticipate the decision of the Church in these matters, but it is permitted to us to hope that in Matt Talbot, God has raised up one whose life is to be for us an example and an inspiration.

During the closing years of Matt Talbot's life the bonds of the Moral Law had been strained in Ireland. A spirit of unrest, of laxity, of revolt against authority, had grown up and had caused a feeling of uneasiness in the older generation which the crowded altar rails and the many evidences of genuine piety could not allay. Through all those years of gathering clouds there lived in our midst a poor, lowly, labouring man, who was a model workman, a model Catholic, and a source of edification to all who knew him. His life pointed out the only path to true peace for all who labour, namely, a life of self-discipline lived in perfect agreement with the Law of God and of His Church. We are not called to abandon all human pleasures as he did, but when we are inclined to repine at our lot and revolt against injustice we can think of him, during all the years of his manhood giving up every human joy and pleasure for the love of God.

Yet, through it all he was no morose recluse who frowned on human joys or who found fault with all who differed from him. He was ever cheerful, ever kindly, ever willing to help another. The saints are never gloomy because there reigns within them the Peace which surpasseth all understanding, and they find their joy on this earth in following the footsteps of their Divine Master.

So this little book has been written for the edification and encouragement of Irish workmen that they may rejoice that one had lived amongst them, one sprung from themselves, who in his life suffered as they suffer and who in death is likely to influence the lives of many who now, for the first time, will learn the story of this life which was hidden with Christ in God.

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