

consolation you will experience will more than compensate for the effort it may cost.

But quite outside the sphere of personal relations many people assume that they are at liberty to hate whole groups of human beings with perfect impunity. As the phrase goes, they 'have no time for' or they 'cannot stand' the English, Irish, Scotch, Roman Catholics, Communists, and it would seem at times pretty well three-quarters of the human race. I know it would be foolish to take these people seriously; but it is part of charity to have tolerance towards those who think and live differently from ourselves, and to acknowledge the good which they evince in their way of life even if it is utterly different from our own.

Christ our Lord wearied not in well-doing; no man had anything but what was good and even pleasant from his hands; all were the happier and the better for their contact with him. 'Good master' says someone to our Lord, and he replies: 'Why callest thou me good? None is good but God.' In the ultimate absolute sense that is true; but Christ was God and it is because we are the sons of God and the brothers of Jesus Christ through his grace that we are called upon to see that we are creative in goodness in our small limited way as God is in his infinite way.



## HE DIED IN CHAINS

T. J. McNAMARA

**T**HE exhumation of the mortal remains of Matt Talbot took place in Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin, on Sunday, 29th June, 1952. His Grace the Archbishop of Dublin presided at the ceremony. The coffin of the Servant of God, when opened, revealed his mortal remains in skeleton form, and the burial shroud which appeared to be a Franciscan habit. In the coffin were also found three chains, three large medals, two crucifixes and portions of a large rosary. The medical experts, having taken the Oath, signed the medical report which will be inserted in the Acts of the Process. The ceremony is part of the Apostolic

process of Beatification and Canonisation, and does not in any way anticipate the decision of the Holy See.

What kind of man was this Matt Talbot? What part did the chains, rosary beads and medals, found in his coffin, play in his life?

Matt Talbot was born on 2nd May, 1856, in Dublin. Both parents were pious, and in no way given to drink. They attended their monthly Confraternity Mass and Communion regularly. Twelve children, eight sons and four daughters, resulted from the marriage. As a young boy Matt went to school at the Christian Brothers, Richmond Street. But book knowledge did not appeal to him; and so, many times, he escaped from his mother, on his way to school, by distracting her attention. He spent the day playing on the dumps, until hunger forced him to return home for tea and the inevitable beating from his father.

At the age of twelve he left school and went to work as a messenger boy for Burke's, wine merchants. It was here that Matt first learned to drink. By the time he was thirteen he was capable of coming home drunk. His father, seeing him heading towards ruin, tried to stop him by giving him a severe beating and having him changed to a new job under his own supervision in the Port and Docks Board. But here it was a case of 'out of the frying pan into the fire'. Now it was not Guinness he drank but whiskey. Every night he came home drunk. That he might not bring disgrace upon his father, at the age of seventeen, Matt got himself a job at Pembertons, building contractors.

Drink had such a degrading effect upon him that he even cruelly treated his own mother. Now and then he gave her a shilling for his keep, but most often he gave her nothing. He usually went straight from work to the public-house. As was the disgraceful custom of the time, wages were paid in the public-house. Matt usually handed his wages to the proprietor who, on agreement, told Matt when his money was running short. He was a favourite among the boys, as every drink for himself meant 'a round' for them. When his wages were spun out, he would often pawn his shoes. His mother tells us that he once came home without any shoes. So drink became second nature to Matt.

No matter how drunk he was the night before, he was always in time for his work at 6 a.m. His fellow workers tell us that he was an excellent workman, and always kept himself clean and tidy.

Despite the 'morning-after-the-night-before' feeling, he never missed his Sunday Mass—the only link with his Faith.

One week Matt did not work. He drank on Monday, drank on Tuesday, drank on Wednesday, and even on Thursday. By Friday his throat was beginning to get dry. On Saturday, it was like the Sahara—parched. There was only one alternative, with no wages on the horizon. He went to meet his pals, coming from work. After all, one good turn deserves another. Some of them were passing, but there was no sign of an invitation. 'Hello, Matt', they said, and hurried on. Others made for the nearest tobacconist for a convenient box of matches. Anger was surging up within him, at the treatment he was receiving from his pals. He would show them yet.

His mother was surprised to see him coming in so early and sober. He ate in silence. In the evening he put on his cap, and said: 'Mother, I'm going to take the pledge.' She was dumbfounded. All she said was: 'Go in God's Name, but don't take it unless you are going to keep it.' He proceeded to Holy Cross College, Clonliffe. At the College he met Dr Keane (later a Dominican), to whom he made his confession and from whom he took the pledge, for three months. Matt was twenty-five years old. It was going to be a hard struggle for one who could not abstain from drink even for a day. Whereas before he gave himself completely to drink, now he would give himself to his Lord and Master, with the same determination. The following morning, he attended the five o'clock Mass and received Holy Communion.

Matt frequently used the Holy Name in vain, while drinking. Finding himself still addicted to it, he found an original remedy. He fastened two pins on his coat sleeve in the form of a cross. Soon this bad habit of cursing wore off. But the craving for drink was torturing him. One night he said to his mother: 'It's no use, mother, I'll drink again when the three months are up.' But he was faithful to his pledge. What heroism and generosity it meant only God could know.

So the three months passed. He renewed his pledge for a year, and then for life. Every morning he heard Mass and received Holy Communion. On the way down to work he would stop to 'visit our Lord', as he said himself. In 1892 he went to work for T. and C. Martin, timber merchants. He began by working on the quays, unloading the ships of timber. The language of the men was

appalling, particularly the profane use of the Holy Name. Every time Matt heard it, he would lift his hat reverently. For a time it was a joke among the men to get the hat bobbing up and down. But soon they began to respect this unusual man in their midst. At the first stroke of the Angelus bell he would remove his hat and unostentatiously say the Angelus.

After a time Matt was removed to the Yard. Here, any spare time he had was spent in prayer. If there occurred a slack period sufficiently long in the morning he would run to the nearest church and hear Mass. He was ever a lover of innocent children. The children who lived in the gate lodge often found him praying behind a pile of timber. He would often speak to them and tell them about the saints. Moreover, every Christmas Eve, Matt knocked at the door of the gate lodge. When the children appeared he would begin to fumble in his pockets, for he loved to watch their wide-eyed expectation. Each would then receive a sixpence.

As time went on, Matt's programme became more complicated. On his way home after work he would visit a church. On arriving at his room at 18 Upper Rutland Street he would kiss the crucifix on the table. Then, kneeling, he would partake of his scanty meal which his sister had prepared. Without rising from his knees, he would begin his devotions. Sir Joseph Glynn, his biographer, gives us a list of these devotions: 'Amongst his regular prayers were fifteen Mysteries of the Rosary of our Lady; the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin; the Dolour beads; the beads of the Immaculate Conception; the beads of the Holy Ghost; the beads of St Michael; the beads of the Sacred Heart; the Chaplet for the souls in Purgatory; the principal litanies; the prescribed Novenas for each Church Feast.' All these were done kneeling and without support. He also did spiritual reading, which will be dealt with later.

He retired to bed at 10.30 p.m. This consisted of two planks, nailed together, and a wooden pillow. An old sack, together with a half blanket if it was very cold, covered him. He slept with a statue of our Lady and the Infant clasped to his heart. At 2 a.m. he rose, at the sound of the alarm-clock. He then remained kneeling in prayer until 4 a.m., when he rested a little until it was time to prepare for Mass. His mother, who lived in the room with him, often heard him, during these nights of prayer, converse with our

Lady, as in regular conversation. While waiting for the church door to be opened, he knelt in prayer on the cold and sometimes wet steps. During Mass he knelt erect and without support, not even rising for the Gospel. So that he might kneel with bare knees, he slit the knees of his trousers lengthways. His overcoat hid the slits when he stood up.

Matt's penances were enormous for one who had to do a hard day's work. Besides those already mentioned, he wore chains for about fourteen years before his death. Around his waist he wore a cart-chain, hung with medals and tied tightly with a rope. Above the elbow of the left arm was wound a light chain. On the right arm, also above the elbow, was a knotted cord. On his left leg below the knee there was a chain bound with cord. On his right leg, also below the knee, he had a heavy knotted cord. Around his neck were hung large beads with many medals. He got his devotion of wearing the chain from reading the life of St Catherine of Siena.

Matt ate very little food. According to his biographer, his fasts were as follows: 'During Lent complete black fast every day on two slight meals without meat, butter, or milk. During June, in honour of the Sacred Heart, a similar black fast. Every Saturday and every Vigil of a Feast day, a black fast. Every Wednesday, no meat, but occasionally a little butter. Sunday, his ordinary dinner at 2 o'clock, that being his first meal of the day; if this were fairly substantial, he did not eat again. Monday, dry bread and black tea. Tuesday, if not a Vigil of a Feast or in Lent, breakfast consisted of cocoa and bread and butter; dinner of a little meat. Thursday was as Tuesday, and Friday a full fast.' A friend who used to have lunch with Matt at the Yard, tells us that Matt ate no meat for nine months of the year.

When Matt had finished his devotions at night, he began his spiritual reading—on his knees; so that he knelt, without support, from seven to ten-thirty. Even books on mystical theology were found in his little library. He always wrote down, on the nearest slip of paper, what most appealed to him. For instance, on one is written, in a large uneducated hand: 'The kingdom of Heaven was promised not to the sensible and educated, but to those that have the spirit of little children. Our Lord himself bore this out, when he said: "Suffer little children to come unto me, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven".' On another slip is written: 'Grant me,

Oh Jesus, Thy Grace and love, and I shall be rich enough.' His whole life of penance showed the grace of God working within him. Also his love of God manifested itself in his love for his neighbour.

He lived on seven and sixpence a week; the rest of his wages he gave in charity. He subscribed regularly to the Maynooth Mission Fund. He paid for the education of students for the priesthood. He had completed three priests, he once told his sister, and was on his fourth. A priest from the South of Ireland came to the Yard to make a collection. It was on a Friday, and the men usually subscribed generously. When the priest had come back from Matt, he said he had never met so generous a man. Matt had given his whole pay-packet. Any of the married men at the Yard, when in difficulties, always got help from him. To him they were other Christs.

As Matt Talbot grew in holiness, he drew further and further away from the world and its activities. He was quite oblivious of the speeches and great mass meetings that went on during the great strike. He walked briskly through the streets, with eyes cast down, never reading the placards. Conversation flowed between himself and his Maker, even while guns were firing and shells exploding in 1916.

In 1923, Matt became ill. He was admitted to the Mater Hospital. His body, worn out by penances, was beginning to revolt. He received the last Sacraments, but, soon afterwards, he was allowed up. Having been discharged from hospital, he resumed his chains, which he had taken off on going in. In 1925 he was again admitted to hospital, but he was again discharged. In April of the same year he resumed work, feeling, as he said himself, better than ever before.

On Trinity Sunday, 7th June, 1925, Matt Talbot left his room for the last time. He was on his way to attend the 9 o'clock Mass at St Saviour's, Dominick Street. He walked very briskly this morning and with a light step. Half-way down Granby Lane, in sight of the Dominican church, he staggered and fell. A woman, seeing him fall, ran across to him. With the help of her son she took him to her house across the way. Seeing that he was very pale, she laid him outside the door. While she was giving him some water to drink his head sagged and his eyes seemed to look beyond her as if someone were waiting for him. She withdrew

her hand knowingly. Matt Talbot was dead. Father Walsh from St Saviour's came and recited the Rosary.

At Jervis Street morgue the Sister was cutting the clothes from the body. The scissors struck something hard. The chains were revealed embedded in the flesh. Alas! the secret was out. That was how we got to know the hidden life of Matt Talbot. If he had died at home in his bed, of an illness, he would have removed the chains, and would have passed into oblivion. It must be God's way of revealing his chosen ones to us for our edification. Even during life he managed to keep his life of fasts and penance to himself. The men he worked with on the quays did not know there was a saint among them. It would seem God wishes all the world to know now. Holy Church, in her own good time, will decide.



## REVIEWS

**THE CHURCH—A DIVINE MYSTERY.** By Abbé Roger Hasseveldt, translated by William Storey. (The Mercier Press; 15s.)

It is unfortunately a fact that much of the teaching about the nature of the Church given and received in our schools (and, dare one say it, in our pulpits), and consequently in Catholic families, is jejune and impoverished because lacking in due balance of emphasis upon external authority and inner life. One result of this is that the connection, and in a real sense, the identity, between Christ and his Church is not infrequently very imperfectly realised, and another that the relation between our redemption from sin by the death of Christ and the renewal in us of that redemptive work by Holy Mass is but very dimly perceived by many Catholics, if indeed it is effectively perceived at all.

The remedy lies in a more concrete and vivid realization of the divine mystery of the Church, and one way of effecting this is by better teaching and better preaching. The book under review is a long and splendid step in the right direction, all the more useful because it is simply expressed and adapted to a wide range of intelligence. Though in no way technically theological, it is none the less deeply theological in its content, and its theology is drawn directly from the biblical sources and illustrated at many points by patristic references, especially to St Augustine.

The relation of Christ to the Blessed Trinity, the nature of his Incarnate life and the extension of that life in the Mystical Body the