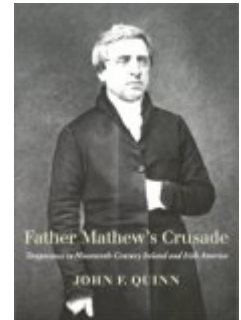


**John F. Quinn.** *Father Mathew's Crusade: Temperance in Nineteenth-Century Ireland and Irish America.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002. viii + 262 pp. \$24.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-55849-340-7.



**Reviewed by** Bryan McGovern

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As Dr. Quinn asserts in the introduction of *Father Mathew's Crusade*, his work is not a biography of Fr. Mathew but rather the story of the mid-nineteenth-century temperance movement that the Capuchin friar headed in Ireland and spread abroad among the Irish in America. As a result of Dr. Quinn's methodology, the reader is able to examine the rise and fall of a movement that inspired millions of Irishmen and women throughout the world to become teetotalers. Quinn's work is a fresh and interesting approach that allows the reader to better understand how and why millions of Irishmen and women took the pledge to abstain from drinking alcohol. However, by focusing almost strictly on the movement itself, rather than Father Mathew the person, the reader never fully understands how one man made such a dramatic impact on the Irish people.

The strength of Quinn's work is undoubtedly his ability to relate the Irish temperance movement to larger political, religious, and social events in Ireland. He convincingly argues that Mathew utilized the process of anglicization in Ireland in the early nineteenth-century along

with Catholic ritualism to attract different groups of people to his movement. To interest those Irish most affected by the process of modernization or anglicization, he convinced the Irish people that temperance would further prosperity. However, he also used symbolism and ritual (an oral promise, a blessing from Mathew, and a temperance medal were all part of the pledge) to attract the more conservative Catholics. Despite his assertion that Mathew utilized modernization to further the temperance movement, Quinn differs from the historian Hugh Kearney, who maintained that the friar was an agent of progress. Rather, Quinn contends that the temperance leader "should be seen as a man behind his times". A dedicated anglophile and ecumenist" who "resembled a cleric of the ancien regime in some respects" (p. 7). Mathew hoped to use the movement to promote better relations between Catholics and Protestants. However, Mathew's willingness to accede to Protestants and the British government, together with financial problems and an unwillingness to relinquish any control of the movement, helped result in the downfall of temperance. The fusion of Catholicism with a fervent nationalism in the

nineteenth century resulted in a clergy suspicious of any tie to Protestantism. Some Irish clergy members became very hostile towards Father Mathew and his movement, causing him great consternation.

Interestingly, Daniel O'Connell, who did for a short period abstain from alcohol and attempted to associate Mathew's movement with his endeavor to repeal the Act of Union (1800), is almost as much the emphasis of Quinn's work as is Mathew. There is little doubt that O'Connell was the dominant political figure in Ireland during the first half of the nineteenth century. And Quinn does an excellent job demonstrating O'Connell's relevance to Ireland during this period, especially as it relates to temperance. However, O'Connell's relevance to the movement may not be so great that he deserves such emphasis

Quinn does valiantly demonstrate the importance of the Famine to weakening Mathew's movement. Obviously, the Famine's effect on Irish society was devastating and no doubt caused people to place their priorities elsewhere. The quest to survive became primary for many. Mathew's response to the horrors of the Famine also demonstrated the British influence on Mathew's political and theological philosophy. This aligned him with, among other Britains, Charles Trevelyan, who deemed the Famine an act of God to punish the primitive Catholics. Although more sympathetic, Mathew also maintained a providential interpretation of the Famine. This is where a more thorough analysis of Mathew's life experiences and personal, theological, and political philosophy would help elucidate much of the mystery of this man. Why was Mathew so willing to see the Famine as an act of God? Historians such as Peter Gray have recently asserted that most British people believed the Famine was an act of divine vengeance. Quinn informs us that Mathew had been influenced by British culture (as was much of Ireland), but he never explains the cause and effect of this angli-

cization of Mathew. What in his past allowed him to become even more anglicized than other Irish clergy? Why, other than being an ecumenicist and anglophile, did he eschew nationalism. A more thorough exploration of his past should help explain many of his actions as leader of the temperance movement.

Mathew traveled to the United States in 1849 to disseminate his message of temperance. As Quinn explains, temperance had originated in the States. Although the author asserts that Mathew led Irish-Americans to become more involved in the temperance movement despite its Protestant influence, he does not explore the origins of temperance in America and its link to evangelical Protestantism. American sectarianism, while not as obvious as its Irish counterpart, was at its zenith in the mid-nineteenth century. Irish-Americans, while trying to fit in with mainstream America, were also cautious about joining Protestant-affiliated movements. How did Mathew convince them? Did an emphasis on prosperity and acculturation persuade many Irish-Americans to retain their Irish identity while also adapting to an alien society? Quinn maintains that Germans ignored abstinence because they drank beer rather than whiskey, precluding them from experiencing problems with alcohol, and because brewing and drinking beer were part of their culture. It is unclear how beer is less dangerous than whiskey, and Quinn ignores his previous assertions that brewing and drinking were also part of the Irish culture (the pub culture in Ireland in some ways parallels the beer hall culture in Germany) but, more importantly, Quinn does not explore what was most likely the Irish identity that had become an integral part of Mathew's movement.

Quinn's book brings to light an often overshadowed figure in Irish history. He effectively relates temperance to a broader historical context, especially in nineteenth-century Ireland. Studies of movements or groups, such as the one Quinn provides here, are extremely valuable to the his-

torical field. Unfortunately, the reader never gets a true sense who Mathew was and how he was personally able to exert such influence over so many Irishmen and women.

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