

Seventy Years Gone

With the publishing of this number arrives our 70th birthday—the first issue of Blackfriars appeared in April 1920. How did we begin? We republish here two long-forgotten Blackfriars articles ...

I : The Founding of *Blackfriars*

Joseph Clayton

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It must have been early in 1919, the time when Father Bede Jarrett resumed his weekly walk with me, that he spoke of his desire for a monthly review; of the need for a new Catholic review in England; a periodical, fearless, outspoken, zealous for truth; not primarily theological; a review that would present, in intelligible fashion, Catholic teaching on social justice, comment on passing events, give adequate space to literature, strike the human note. A Dominican review—acceptable to the unlearned—and, perhaps this was harder, a review the learned would not disdain. The articles must not be heavy, nor yet be too obtruse for the plain man. Scientific technicalities were to be avoided, humour not discouraged. A Dominican review that would appeal to the laity and, no doubt, might be read by the clergy. In all its criticism of books and political activities, and in the inevitable controversies that would be provoked, the review, while not allowing truth to be obscured by feelings of charity, must not let the plea of truth excuse want of charity. All cocksureness, arrogance, identification of personal opinions with eternal verities—in short, all pontificating by lay-writers on matters by no means *de fide* was to be deprecated, as far as possible excluded.

So, in many talks, Father Bede discussed the review he projected, the kind of review he wanted, that he believed there was room for; a review that would find its public. Of course he knew quite well that Catholics in England are not addicted to the habit of reading, preferring in their newspapers startling headlines rather than sober statement or reasoned argument. Aware of this disadvantage, equally aware that a

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large body of Anglicans read Catholic literature, Father Bede reached a definite decision—a monthly Dominican review should be established.

The choice of a title was gravely considered. I cannot remember who first suggested 'Blackfriars' but Father Bede at once adopted it (was it his own suggestion?) The fact that Printing House Square, the historic printing and publishing house of *The Times*, stood on the site of the great Dominican priory, the name surviving in Blackfriars Bridge, favoured the title *Blackfriars*.

Choice of editor was of serious but secondary importance. Father Bede Jarrett was Provincial with responsibilities not only in Great Britain, but also for Dominican communities in South Africa and the West Indies. He never intended to undertake the editorship. Father Bernard Delany was appointed to the editor's chair, and Father Bede wrote to me that Delany recalled the name of Delane, the famous Victorian editor of *The Times*, when *The Times* was the 'Thunderer'—and what could be more suitable? At the same time, as a help to the new editor, not in any way as a drag on editorial tendencies to high speed and quick judgement, still less for the damping down of fiery irruption, Father Bede devised an editorial board, an advisory committee. Father Vincent McNabb; Stanley Morison—already in possession of a zest for good printing and of a growing knowledge of typography that would bring him to a foremost place in the direction of the art of printing, and make him the recognised authority, the master mind; the late Father Luke Walker—God rest his soul; were of that informal committee. Father Vincent and myself, being then over fifty, represented the sober restraining influence of middle age; Father Bede, Father Bernard, Father Luke and Stanley Morison were all of a later generation. Since no periodical can be conducted successfully by any committee or board, it was only at the beginning we were brought together in a consultative capacity. To promote the fellowship of 'Blackfriars' Father Bede entertained us at lunch at Jack Straw's Castle on Hampstead Heath on one or two occasions, and at those excellent meals the talk concerned the aims of *Blackfriars*, and no doubt much besides, not directly obvious or strictly relevant to the subject. If they did nothing else, and I don't believe the editor was ever hampered by anything said at these congenial gatherings, they did kindle and foster friendships that have endured, friendships that for some of us are counted of blessed and grateful remembrance.

On one point we were all agreed—Truth was the essential thing for *Blackfriars*, 'Veritas' being the motto of the Dominican Order of Preachers. To the service of truth were we all bound. Enthusiasms must be tempered with discretion; or discretion lit by enthusiasm—I forget which way it went.

Then in the spring of 1920 the first number of *Blackfriars* duly appeared, and the Catholic world betrayed neither astonishment nor grave concern. Some of our articles—I recall a number I wrote on

'Economics for Christians'—provoked dislike. They are the merest commonplaces today, these economics of social justice, but twenty years ago they were hailed as 'rank bolshevism,' and I am sure did the review no good from the circulation manager's standpoint. However, Father Bernard never suggested I should leave off writing. And if it comes to that, some of Father Vincent's contributions were described as 'outrageous.' Efforts were even made at Rome, so I was told, to get *Blackfriars* suppressed. Father Bede was the last person to be disturbed by the criticisms of foolish and timid men.

How full of hope he was, Father Bede Jarrett, when *Blackfriars* was founded. Youth and the grace of God may account for the hopefulness, but he also had the charity that thinketh no evil and the faith in God—and in man—that is sure basis of hope. In this spirit of hopefulness he sought for possible contributors, kept an eye on new books and looked out for reviewers. (Discussing the question of payment, the trouble was that distinguished Catholic writers would be apt to dump what could not be sold elsewhere unless payment was offered.) Of the various memorials of the sixteen years—1916-1932—when Father Bede Jarrett was Provincial, it may well be that *Blackfriars* is not the least.

II : The Name 'Blackfriars'

Walter Gumbley OP

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The name Blackfriars is a survival of our Catholic past. To the average Londoner—that most provincial of Englishmen—it suggests a certain bridge over the Thames, or perhaps the station on the District Railway. For the man with little sense of history, who gathers his associations from things around him, historic names easily lose their original significance. Waterloo in London or Liverpool does not always smite the imagination with visions of Wellington and 1815. Carmelite Street harbours men whose ways are far removed from those of the friars of Carmel. The Coliseum is badly named if it meant to suggest its namesake in Rome. And the Alhambra does not exactly speak to us of the glories of Spanish art.

How often does the word Blackfriars as currently used in London

today bring to mind the Dominicans? Yet it is certain that the Dominicans, or, to give them their correct title, Preaching Friars or Friar-Preachers, were generally known as Blackfriars in pre-Reformation days, though it is not easy to say at what date precisely the name first appears. The Dominican habit consists of a long tunic or gown of white wool over which is worn a long scapular and a hood or capuce of the same colour and material. The Rule enjoins that, outside his convent, the friar should wear the cappa, the name given to a long black cloak, together with a hood, also of black. Thus to the outsider the Friar-Preacher would appear robed in black. From this fact arose the name Blackfriar.

The earliest reference we have found to the use of the word is in a charter granted to the Friar-Preachers of Aberdeen in 1342, by one Andrew Sleich, in which he refers to the convent as 'Black freiris' place. The same Dominican house is called 'Black freiris' in another charter ten years later (1352).¹ In England we have not found any instance of the use of the word previous to the year 1466, when we find it employed in the will of Lady Cicily Torboke, who willed 'that the blake frerys of Chester have vjs. viijd.'²

It is of interest to note that the other names applied to the Friar-Preachers, i.e. Jacobins (from the name of their great house of St. Jacques in Paris), Predicants, Order of St. Dominic, and Dominicans, all occur earlier in England than the name Blackfriar. Also of interest is the description given of his brethren by Fr. Roland Harding in a deed which he drew up in 1537, styling himself 'Prior of the Freres domynyks otherwise named the schode Freres or blake freyers.'³ Schode or Shod refers to the use of shoes by the Dominicans, who, unlike some other Orders, did not go barefoot.

After the middle of the fifteenth century the name Blackfriars became fairly general, and at the Suppression nearly all Dominican houses are spoken of by the king's visitors as 'Blackfriars.'

1 Aberdeen Friars, *Cal. of Documents*, ed. Anderson, 1909, pp.15, 16.

2 Palmer, 'Blackfriars of Chester', *Reliquary*, Oct. 1882, p.101.

3 Palmer, 'Friar-Preachers of Newcastle-on-Tyne', *Reliquary*, Jan. 1878, p.164.