

## BIOGRAPHY OF FATHER BEDE JARRETT (VI).<sup>1</sup>

ALL through his sixteen years as Provincial, Father Bede strongly held that discipline has no value after childhood unless it is self-discipline. He abhorred coercive and nagging methods of enforcing it. Under his rule the best had every incentive to do their best, and the worst all the freedom that God allows them to do their worst. He was eminently loyal to our Lord's counsel not to resist evil but to overwhelm it with good. Like his Master he acknowledged openly that religion is the happiest hunting-ground of Pharisees and profiteers, and he never concealed his indignation when he saw one man's evil hindering another man's good; but his remedy was to exhort the good to suffer the evil, and so convert it—if haply it would be converted—to like goodness. He had a firm faith in the moral of the Beatitudes—that to the meek and persecuted alone is given all power in heaven and on earth to conquer the froward tyrant. He well knew that when any ruler makes this foolishness of the Cross his only instrument of government, scandals needs must come. He had to brave the saddening experience of more than one. But he was worried neither by them nor by the mistakes and failures to which his leniency might expose himself and others. Only the grace of God, he believed, could save the Province from disaster under his rule; but he confidently counted on that grace, neglecting none of the appointed ways and means of meriting it.

For the first month after his election to be Provincial he was principally occupied in learning his new duties. Then he resumed, as though there had been no interruption,

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<sup>1</sup> Further extracts from the forthcoming *Life of Father Bede Jarrett, O.P.*, by John-Baptist Reeves, O.P.

the public work he had previously been engaged upon. He turned first to his preparations for the Dominican lectures in London. 'I am sorry about the delay,' he wrote to Lady Cadogan after a month's silence, 'but as Provincial I have had so much official work that St. Thomas has got to be patient, poor man.'



But he felt that the venture was going badly, and did not conceal his disappointment. He was reprovèd for being too pessimistic.

'You are right,' he answered. 'I was wrong all the time. But an O.P. is a natural sort of person and says what he feels, not what he is supposed to feel. . . . Naturally faith would tell us that not peace only but joy can hardly be complete or even really possible without an absolute union with the Divine Will. The harder the struggle, also the deeper the following peace and joy. But then because joy lies not only in the soul but overflows into the emotions as its proper seat, and just because the emotions lie on the frontier between soul and sense and are subject to a dual sovereignty, it is doubly difficult to produce it at the proper moment. I have small difficulty, if I may venture to be personal, in discovering that my peace and happiness can only be found in the Divine Will and in actually appreciating it as their foundation and basis; but when it comes to joy then I must admit I am wobbly. When the gloom of these terrible happenings overshadows life and weighs always at the back of the mind, though one knows it is best, one may be unable to feel it. Hence to sing a *Te Deum* requires from me so terrible an effort that I am all undone! *Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa!*'

This was written in the darkest days of war, when facile cheerfulness would have been inhuman, especially in him: the lists of maimed and killed already included the names of many who were very dear to him. The letter just quoted was part of a correspondence that elicited from him more of his secret sorrows than he usually confided to anyone. A little later he confessed:

'Really God has been most kind to me all my life long. Sorrow of course does turn up and at the present moment when

so many of one's best-loved ones have been killed or are in imminent peril of death, the whole weight at the back of the mind turns one, quite wrongly I know, to taste rather of the gloom of life. I do not fancy I give way to it, nor even that generally I show it at all. In fact people have told me that they wonder how I can keep my spirits going when there is so much heaviness of heart around. But there just come times—and you caught me in one of them—when the whole fabric of life seems upside down, and one can bear it no longer without a groan. It is weakness, failure, want of perfect confidence in God; but there it is all the same.'

In the letters that follow this it is clear that he is fighting his way interiorly from depression to serenity.



'I am buying the *Catholic Review*,' he wrote on May 3, 1919.

This was the beginning of the monthly publication now known as **BLACKFRIARS**. In January, 1920, Father Bernard Delany was appointed editor and preparations were begun for the first issue to appear the following April. To begin with, no publisher could be found to undertake the risk of launching the Review; Messrs. Burns, Oates and Washbourne agreed to act as distributing agents, and Father Bede himself had to meet all the expenses of printing and payment of contributors. In February, 1922, the editor now being resident in Oxford, Basil Blackwell, of Broad Street, undertook to print, publish, distribute and push the Review, taking all financial responsibility except the payment of contributors, which was left to the Dominicans.

In the early days the Editor was assisted by an advisory board which included Father Bede himself, Fathers Vincent McNabb and Luke Walker, O.P., Mr. Joseph Clayton, and Mr. Stanley Morison. They met informally, sometimes over a meal provided by Father Bede at places like Jack Straw's Castle. This arrangement proved unworkable, however, and was soon dropped. The Editor was left with an absolutely free hand to conduct the Review with whatever help he could command. Father Bede con-

tinued to support him with long letters of detailed advice and with introductions to likely writers; his own contributions began in the third issue and continued to be frequent though not regular, until Father Delany, succeeding him as Provincial, appointed him his successor as editor. Long before then BLACKFRIARS had become a settled and going concern, though it was never a very prosperous one financially.

'I have bought (but not paid for—I'm a real Catholic priest) land in Oxford for an O.P. House and all after the war. I still want £6,000. Where am I to find it?' Father Bede wrote this to a friend on April 17th, 1918, having been not quite two years Provincial. Thus began the realization of his life's most cherished dream and the labour that pressed most heavily, yet most agreeably, on him until he at last fell ill and died, tired out.

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'You ask my plans,' he wrote on New Year's Day, 1919.

'Well, at present I am absorbed chiefly in the Oxford priory. We have bought three houses and hope in a couple of years time to build a priory, partly by adapting the present 16th century houses (with Queen Anne parts) and partly by building a wing and a chapel. . . .'

On December 5th, 1919, he wrote on a postcard from Rome:

'The Holy Father offered to subscribe to Oxford in an audience I had this morning.'

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On August 15th, the Feast of Our Lady's Assumption and the seven hundredth anniversary of the first arrival of Friars Preachers in Oxford, the foundation stone of their third home there was solemnly laid by Cardinal Bourne. A large and brilliant assembly, including representatives of the university world and many non-Catholics, assisted at the ceremony, and the event attracted wide notice in England and abroad.

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At the luncheon Father Mackey spoke on behalf of the whole Order:

'We wish this house to be a true religious house, a source of sanctity and edification to Oxford and all our countrymen. We wish to renew the traditions of friendship and goodwill that formerly united all the authorities of the Church with all the authorities of the University, and indeed with all English men and women.'

Cardinal Bourne paid a warm personal tribute to Father Bede:

'Oxford gave him the great gifts which Oxford is able to bestow. The Catholic Church made Oxford, and the Catholic Church has gifts which she alone can bestow; and Father Provincial by his own gifts is planning to give back to Oxford more than she has given him.'

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On May 4th, 1929, letters were received from Rome erecting the new house into a Priory and appointing Father Bernard Delany the first Prior. One of the original community of three appointed to Blackfriars in 1921 and the first actually to go into residence there, Father Delany had on December 1st, 1924, taken the Oxford degree of Bachelor of Letters. 'He is the first Dominican,' wrote Father Bede in his diary in very large script, 'to graduate from a Dominican convent (in Oxford) since the Reformation.'

The new community, drawn from Hawkesyard, arrived in Oxford on May 17th; and the next day, the eve of Pentecost, the whole body of professors, students and lay-brothers was solemnly received by Father Bede according to the Dominican ritual. Choral office, never to cease in Oxford unless some fresh persecution of religion should silence it once more, was resumed after an interruption of four hundred years by the singing of the First Vespers of the Feast of Pentecost—the titular feast of this Priory of the Holy Ghost.

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The new community was beginning its independent existence in great poverty, for of the great sums Father Bede had collected for the new establishment, nothing was left over for its endowment. Father Bede's only obligation now to the new community was to withdraw and leave it the full liberty of action that was its right. But its members in their first helplessness still looked to him as their father and founder, and he, lest their struggle to maintain themselves should distract them from the high purpose for which he had brought them to Oxford, now made it his aim to provide for their needs in perpetuity as far as he could. In this he was supported from the first by a group of friends who in 1928 wished to organize a presentation to him for the silver jubilee of his priesthood. When he begged them not to proceed with this, they formed themselves into the body since known as *The Friends of Blackfriars*.

The temple which he caused to be 'built with hands' in Oxford remains to-day his most fitting monument. It is a symbol in stone of the living temple of the Holy Ghost which he strove to be himself and to help others to be. It reflects the harmony and concentrated purpose of his life. While it was building it was the centre of all his many activities: not as their end, but as the channel in which they all met to flow together to their eternal end. It was the interest that overshadowed every other, quickening all and distracting him from none. The years 1918 to 1928 were the most fruitful of his life in every direction: in his interior religious life, in his work for the Order and for the brethren and sisters of the English Province, as a preacher, as a writer, as the devoted friend of an ever increasing circle of friends.

*(Further extracts will appear in a subsequent issue.)*