

SOME LETTERS OF
BLESSED JORDAN OF SAXONY

Translated by K. E. POND

[Blessed Jordan of Saxony, first Master General after St Dominic, entered the Dominican Order in 1220. Among his many labours he had the care of the Convent of St Agnes at Bologna, and when he was prevented by the duties of his office from visiting the Sisters, he wrote letters to them which embodied his teaching. In the original Latin the letters to Blessed Diana (the Prioress) and the other nuns read quite freshly after a lapse of seven centuries. Their spiritual teaching is as important now as then. A very small selection is here given in translation.]¹

I

BROTHER JORDAN, useless servant of the Order of Preachers, to his dear daughters in Christ the Sisters of St Agnes at Bologna: seek and receive Christ Jesus.

When I see you so much of one mind and so eager in walking with the Lord, and when I find that you seek nothing except him who alone is able to satisfy you, and without whom whatever (else) you have is not riches indeed but poverty, it is a comfort to me, dear daughters, to think about you. And you possess him so much the more completely in proportion as you have surrendered yourselves to him, practising detachment both of body and soul, that your Bridegroom, who alone has redeemed body and soul, may possess you fully and that, as the Apostle says, you may be holy in body and spirit. And indeed it is most certain that God gives himself to us the more lavishly in the measure in which we are generous of ourselves towards him.

Since I perceive, then, that you have hearts ready to dare all things and that not only have you left for the love of Jesus Christ, your soul's bridegroom, whatever you *could* give up for him, but that you faithfully labour each day to see how you can strip yourselves more and more, and to cast your care upon the Lord and to cling only to the love of your Redeemer, to cleave to whom is (your) good: perceiving these things, then, not without heartfelt joy do I give thanks unto him who has called you unto the grace in which you now are, working in you so that you may both will perfection and achieve it in the measure of your goodwill. See to it, dear Sisters, that you do not receive this grace in vain; for it is a very special good

¹ Translated from the Latin: *B. Jordanis de Saxonica Opera*, cura Fr J.-J. Berthier, O.P., Friburgi Helvetiorum, 1899.

which you have received from him, a perfect gift which did not derive its origin from you but came from above, coming down from the Father of lights who shines in your hearts by grace, calling you into his marvellous light. Therefore while you have the light, walk towards the light, that the darkness may not overtake you: walk, I say, in the light of your God.

He who walks in an orderly manner does not crawl through negligence, nor does he rush headlong in his thoughtless disorder and impetuosity. This, indeed, which I now speak of is the evil I fear for you before all others, lest, I mean, there be found among you Sisters who indiscreetly and without moderation hastily take refuge in an excessive flow of tears, or who make themselves singular by vigils or abstinences; or lest some other affliction of the kind should prove too much for your frail bodies. For you are capable of fewer things than you imagine and the strength of any one of you is easily almost exhausted—and that too when she still believes that much strength remains in her body.

I have often warned you about this, as you know, for I am always afraid of it for you, and to keep on writing the same things to you is not indeed idleness on my part, for it is necessary for you. About this matter, therefore, use discretion.

For the rest, as you are praying to our Lord, and have been answered, about the students of Padua, where a good twenty honest men have since come in (to the Order); so do you now take care to give abundant thanks to him, and do not slacken in your prayers by one jot or tittle.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

Brother Gerard, our travelling companion, gives you greeting in Christ Jesus.

III

Brother Jordan, useless servant of the Order of Preachers, to his dear sister in Christ, Diana, at Bologna, salvation and the consolation of the Holy Ghost, the Paraclete.

What I hear about you, that you are worried and troubled about my illness, does not please me—as if you wished to exclude me from the number of the sons of God and wished that I should have no share in the Passion of Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Don't you know that God scourges every son whom he receives? Don't you want him to receive me among his sons? Is your disturbance of mind good? If you want me to enter into the Kingdom, do let me tread the path which leads to the Kingdom; for it behoves us to enter there through many tribulations.

If illness were to turn out to my (spiritual) harm, it would indeed please me that you should take it hardily. But if it is good and profit-

able for me, I don't want you to disturb yourself in any way, Sister, over what is for my good. And so if you want to give me consolation and to ward off the cause of my trouble, lay aside your sadness of spirit and be willing to be cheered up. Only pray for me to the Lord, and ask him that whatever future suffering has to be borne may be turned into my correction and thus into an advantage for me. The good and faithful craftsman knows how much purifying his vessel needs; and so we must submit to his will in all things and leave our mode of life in his hands. All the same, you should know that whereas recently I was laid low not only by fever but by other complaints, now by God's help I have recovered. . . . Take heart then, and keep always in view that life where no disease enters, as the Prophet says: 'There shall no evil come to thee: nor shall the scourge come near thy dwelling' (Ps. xc, v. 10, *Douay translation*). Certainly here in the miseries of our present sojourning, the evils of sin draw near to us. And since many are the scourges of the sinner, it is not strange if in this life we are scourged for our excesses; and so I, too, am ready for scourges if I may thus reach that dwelling-place, namely God, to which no scourge draws near; for no evil of sin enters there, that is, into those most pure and lightsome mansions into which may the loving and holy Son of God, Jesus Christ, he who is blessed for ever and ever, vouchsafe to bring me, together with you. Amen.

Goodbye and greet my dear daughters (for me) and cheer them in the Lord. Brother Gerard sends affectionate greetings both to you and them.

VIII

Brother Jordan, useless servant of the Order of Preachers, to his dear daughter in Christ, Diana, salvation and consolation of the Holy Spirit, by which consolation the hearts of the children of God are cheered.

There is no doubt that it was formerly handed down by the holy prophets, and more recently by Paul, in whom Christ was speaking, that we ought to rejoice with the servants of Jesus Christ, especially in their happiness and consolations. And so, having fresh reports of the consolation with which you have been cheered, and learning, among the Sisters, of the blessing which has recently been given to you, I too congratulate all the Sisters, for their joy is mine.

And so, dear daughter, although you are not unaware how formerly, wherever I might be, I was always one with you, desiring and seeking your good and that of all the Sisters, yet in the future I will, if God permit, be even more solicitous.

Now the letters which the Sovereign Pontiff gave me for you I commit to your attention, and do you be a faithful guardian of them. Lest, however, I should seem ungrateful, I want you to be quite

clear about the wonderful graces which our Saviour bestowed on me after I left you, to whom give thanks many times over for the gifts he has given me. For Christ has drawn to the Order eighteen suitable men, whom I recommend to you, with the others, and their purpose is holy.

Greetings . . .

IX

Brother Jordan, useless servant of the Order of Preachers, to his dear daughter in Christ, Sister Diana, of St Agnes, Bologna, eternal salvation.

Dear Sister, your prudence knows well enough that so long as we are detained in the exile of this world, we all struggle against many immeasurable defects and are not able to attain to that stability which will be given in the future life. And this is the reason why we do not bear ourselves with equanimity in all those things which happen round about us. Sometimes we are too much elated by prosperity, at others too much dismayed by misfortunes. Yet it behoves us, since we want to attain future immortality, to conform ourselves at least in some slight measure to our future life while we are still in this present one, in that we should centre our hearts on God's excellence and, as far as we can, we should strive to place all our hope, all our trust and all our support in the Lord, in order that, as God remains unchanging and unmoved in himself, so we may imitate him as far as we can in that very quality. For he is a safe refuge, never failing, always an abiding place, and the more one flees to him, the more securely does one stand firm. And so the Saints, who had such very great hope in the Lord, easily despised whatever misfortune might happen to them in this life. And do you, dear Sister, flee to the Lord ever more and more, and whatever of harshness or pain may fall to your lot it will not touch the centre of your heart, since that will have been firmly fixed. Impress this well and frequently upon your heart and induce your Sisters to do likewise.

XXV

Brother Jordan, useless servant of the Order of Preachers, eternal salvation to his dear daughter in Christ, Diana.

They who survive, still live on to die; they grieve and are saddened by the death of their friends who die before them. For they who precede others in death, since they are already dead, now no longer mourn for the death of those who die after them. You, then, dear Sister, predeceased your father a long time ago (for you have now been dead a long time if your life is hidden with Christ in glory: but he, as I have recently learnt at Milan, is [but lately] dead), and so it is proper that you should not grieve over his death: or if you do grieve, consider yourself not yet completely dead. I do not say this

indeed as if his death did not touch me: it touches me in very truth, but chiefly on your account. Yet you ought to ponder over the mercy of God, how he takes away from you your parents in the flesh, who are parents for this world only, that he may give to you a spiritual and eternal friend. See how he takes away what you were yet not able to keep, that he may grant you an everlasting friend whom you need not lose for all eternity. Amen.

I have written you this hastily from Milan, for the messenger cannot wait.

Goodbye, and greet all your Sisters for me. I shall see you soon, if God will.

XXVII

Brother Jordan, useless servant of the Order of Preachers, to his dear daughter in Christ, Sister Diana, and the whole Chapter of the Sisters of St Agnes at Bologna, in the choir of the holy virgins who follow the Lamb, the Virgin's Son, whithersoever he goeth.

I do not write much to you at present because I have every hope that, God willing, I shall soon be speaking to you face to face. But in the meantime, dear daughters, do each and every one of you put me, a wretched sinner, into your prayers to God, that he may grant me his good grace so that I may be able, his grace pre-venting and following me, to achieve his will fully in the ministry committed to my charge.

For I have great confidence in your prayers, chiefly in that you pray with one mind and heart, for it is rare that when many pray some at least should not be heard.

Now if temptations hitherto unknown come upon you, don't be frightened, because these are the battles and rebellions against which the Lord would have his servants and handmaids to be valiant and great-hearted: for the Lord, whose war it is, is your helper. For what prince, if he were mighty in battle, would not immediately arise to help his frail and devoted little handmaids and sisters fighting on his account and in his stead, if only they do not flee in the time of warfare but turn their face towards him and call upon him? Therefore, fight not only manfully, but also wisely, for Solomon says that one should go forth to battle methodically. Do you, then, fight prudently, until you gradually, not violently, obtain the mastery over the flesh: and so, proficient in the practice of spiritual virtues one by one, ascend the ladder of perfection, not at one bound but step by step, and at long last reach the end of all consummation.

And to conclude this short sermon, since there should be measure in all things, and you should be people of measure, only the divine

love knows neither limit nor measure. But that is fostered not by afflicting your flesh, but in holy desires and loving meditations and through the touchwood of sisterly love by which every one of you loves her neighbour as herself.

Brother Bernard, the Prior Provincial, greets you.

ST DAVID AND WALES

BY

ILLTUD EVANS, O.P.



IN St David's Day Welshmen are apt to make speeches. For once in the year the virtue of speaking Welsh is generally conceded. One of the objections to giving much time to Welsh in the schools used to be its lack of 'commercial value': Welsh, it was argued reasonably enough, brought no dividends. John Capgrave, in his *Legenda Nova Historie Angliæ*, tells a story which suggests that Welsh may be very useful indeed:

'A certain Welshman coming from the diocese of Menevia was captured by the Saracens, and was put in chains together with a German. The Welshman cried aloud day and night in his own language to St David, "Dewi, wared!", which is to say, "David, come to my aid!" And, wonderful to relate, he suddenly found himself restored to his own country. Making this known to Gervase, at that time the bishop of those parts, he was taken into the dwelling of the latter on account of so notable a miracle. But his companion the German, considered to be privy to what had happened, was submitted to beatings and placed in even stricter custody. He remembered, therefore, how his companion frequently called out "Dewi, wared!", and although he did not understand the meaning of the words he decided to cry aloud in the same manner and began to exclaim, "Dewi wared!" Without delay he was suddenly caught up and brought to his own home, and he knowing nothing of how it came about. He tried everywhere to find out what the words might mean, but without success until he came to Paris where a certain Welshman made known to him the meaning of those words. He gave thanks to God, and in acknowledgment of so notable a benefit he decided to go as a pilgrim to St David's shrine at Menevia. Arrived there, he was seen by his companion, who greatly wondered and greeted him with tears of joy. And to him he told the whole account of what had happened'.