

BLACKFRIARS

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FATHER BEDE JARRETT, O.P.

THE death of Father Bede Jarrett is so fresh a memory that we cannot disentangle our emotions from the thought of it. Thousands everywhere have been struck as with a sense of the personal loss of a real friend and the dominant note in the prevailing grief, so spontaneous, so genuine, so universal, is sorrow not for the dead but for the living—an overwhelming sorrow for ourselves and for each other.

When we first heard that Father Bede was ill it came with the strange shock of an entirely new idea. It had always been a kind of legend among his brethren that he was never ill. His own health was a thing he never spoke of or seemed to care about. So little was he concerned about self that when sickness came he either did not understand it or refused to recognise it. He had always seemed to bear a charmed life and now that the spell was broken we somehow knew by a kind of presentiment, as he also seemed to know, that this first illness was the last and that it foreshadowed the end. His apparently good health, his almost athletic vigour, mental alertness, his ever-fresh enthusiasm for anything young and alive, and all that vitality which seemed part of him, had created around him a glowing atmosphere of perennial youthfulness. No wonder we still hear people saying: 'I cannot believe he is dead.' No wonder that those who visited the Rosary Chapel at St. Dominic's, London, on those days before his burial failed to

recognize in that still, majestic figure lying before the **altar** even the features of the vivacious Father Bede whom they had known and loved in life.

He who was so brim-full of life lived a life full to overflowing. There are human regrets at a splendid life being cut short in full career; and Cardinal Bourne has written: 'We thought his real work still awaited him'; yet heaven has ordained otherwise, and we cannot but see a grand completeness in this life finely lived and finely ended. He reconciled himself to death at the beginning of his illness and faced it with his wonted courage. His almost over-eagerness for death hampered somewhat at first the efforts of the doctors and nurses. When this was explained to him and he was asked to try to help them, he acquiesced, but rather with the patience of one who was now resigned to live. He joined in the daily prayers to Blessed Thomas More for his recovery with great faith and simple confidence. He was surprised rather than disappointed at the end of the novena when a miracle had not occurred; but, characteristically, not with any thought of himself, only because, as he put it, he had 'let down the Prior' (who had organized the public prayers) and because Blessed Thomas had not a spectacular miracle to his credit for the purpose of helping on his canonization. When it was urged that Blessed Thomas was arranging it in his own leisurely way and not with dramatic suddenness, Father Bede replied: 'Yes, but I wanted something we could write to Rome about.' The end came quite unexpectedly on the very day when there seemed to be indications of the beginnings of a real return to health. 'Swift death and no long dalliance with decay' is the lucky soldier's enviable privilege. As much to be envied are those who manage by good fortune to give the slip to old age and yet are granted the fulfilment of the sublime aspiration, 'Work till the end of **my** life: life till the end of my work.'

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There is no intention here of anticipating the functions of the biographer or of attempting an adequate account, **or**

full-length portrait; but it will be of service to set out some facts and dates.

Cyril Jarrett (he took the name of Bede later when he became a Dominican) was born on the 22nd of August, 1881, the fifth son of Colonel H. S. Jarrett, C.I.E., of Speldhurst, Kent, and of Agnes Delacour Beaufort, his wife, who was descended from an old Huguenot family. In his eleventh year he was sent to the Jesuit College at Stonyhurst in Lancashire and remained there a pupil from 1891 to 1898. Many of those who knew him at Stonyhurst, both masters and fellow-scholars, are still happily with us; and it is to be hoped that some of the precious memories of his schooldays will be recorded. On the 24th of September, 1898, he received the Dominican habit, and the name of Brother Bede at Woodchester in Gloucestershire. A novice is very much one of a crowd, and from the nature of his daily life inconspicuous and indistinguishable from his fellows. Yet in the memory of a former novice-master he stands out as remarkable for his cheerfulness, his observance of rule, and especially of silence. These simple qualities of the fervent novice, silent and observant, remained with him all through life; and to many of us he has always seemed the living embodiment of the ideal Dominican.

After completing his noviciate and making his first profession on the 24th of September, 1899, he proceeded to Hawkesyard in Staffordshire for his Philosophical and Theological Studies. He made solemn profession on the 24th of September, 1902, and received the minor orders, subdiaconate and diaconate in due course. In 1904, in Michaelmas Term, he matriculated at Oxford as a student with the Benedictines at Hunter-Blair's Hall (the present St. Benet's Hall), and subsequently took a first-class in Classical Moderations and in the Final School of Modern History. At the end of his first Oxford term he was ordained priest (18th of December, 1904) at Woodchester, by Dr. Burton, the Bishop of Clifton. Fr. Bernard Vaughan, the famous Jesuit, during a visit to Oxford referred in a speech to Father Bede as 'the first swallow of the Dominican

summer '—a pretty prophecy which later on Father Bede himself was to be instrumental in fulfilling.

After finishing at Oxford he spent a year at Louvain, where he took a degree in Theology; and then he was stationed in London at St. Dominic's, where he began his apostolic career, preaching, writing, working, which continued practically without a break until the day he collapsed last February. At the unusually early age of 33 he was elected Prior of St. Dominic's and began his term of office on 17th of June, 1914. Two years later he was elected Provincial on 5th of September, 1916, and he held this office for sixteen years, being elected four times successively and thus achieving a record in the history of the seven-hundred-years-old English Province.

The list of his achievements as Provincial is a long one. He transferred the Dominican School for boys from Hawkesyard to Laxton and enlarged the school materially as well as in scope and possibilities. He inaugurated in London Thomistic Lectures which have been approved and sponsored by London University. A new foundation was made in Edinburgh, new missions in South Africa and Persia were launched, thanks to his initiative and courage. The new Priory of Blackfriars in Oxford will remain the monument to his vision, faith and zeal. At the laying of the foundation stone by Cardinal Bourne in the presence of Cardinal Gasquet on the 15th of August, 1921, Father Bede spoke of his dream and hope of seeing the new Church and Priory completed. He said: 'We are beginning without a penny, but we shall build as the money comes in.' Eight years later he saw the opening of the Church and its consecration, free of debt. The present Master General in a very touching reference to Father Bede Jarrett writes: 'Only God knows what the construction and organization of this marvellous priory at Oxford cost him. It is our own belief that the malady which was eventually to bring about his collapse in the height of his apostolic career dates from that time.' The marvel is, of course, that he went on so long. How he managed all he did is an unrevealed mystery. Amid very burdensome ad-

ministrative charges he fulfilled an ever-accumulating list of preaching and lecturing engagements, for he was always **in** demand. The writing of books and articles, the interminable daily correspondence (which miraculously he nearly always dealt with by return of **post**), instructing converts, 'directing' and dealing with 'difficult cases' and tiresome people (of whom there were not a few!)—all these were among some of the activities that filled an already crowded day. Yet he himself was always the same calm, collected, serenely cheerful presence. There was no sense **of** hustle or fuss about him, no fidgetty nervyness, no suggestion **of** strain or overwork. His room, so neat, tidy, orderly and quite bare of all but absolute essentials, with not a thing out **of** place, did not look like the scene **of** any very unusual activity. Here he would put aside any work he was doing to listen to any caller as if he himself had all day to spare to listen to any one's trouble.

Yet, though **so** preoccupied and overburdened with work, he was scarcely ever known to be absent from a community duty. Before the caller in the morning had finished his rounds, Father Bede was having a cold bath. He was always the first man in choir, and in his regularity, punctuality and devotion to the Divine Office he outvied his patron the Venerable Bede. **As** the Master General has said in his letter, already quoted: 'It was nothing short of a marvel to see him day by day **and** every day **present** in the choir with perfect punctuality and regularity,' and the Master General is speaking of the Louvain days when, by reason of his special studies, Father Bede could legitimately have exempted himself. His place in choir in London would be empty for long spells when he was away preaching or visiting the outposts of the Province in South Africa or the West Indies, and then suddenly one evening or morning he would appear there in his place, quite fresh-looking and spruce, wearing a clean habit and the very model of recollection, quietly taking his part in the Office, having just arrived from New York or Cape Town with as little **fuss** and pomp and circumstance as if it were no further away than the distance of a penny tram ride.

Father Bede possessed enormous powers of concentration, an equally enormous capacity for hard work, an uncanny talent for taking in detail and dealing with minutiae, and that miracle of miracles in one so absorbed in affairs—anabsolutely reliable and unleaking memory. He never seemed to forget anything or anybody. (Yes: there was one person he always seemed to overlook and forget, and that was Father Bede!)

As a religious superior he was one of heaven's gentlemen and possessed that courtesy of charity which we can describe, perhaps imperfectly, as supernatural politeness. He managed to steer clear of the two pet vices of superiors, impatience and petulance. He could be firm and he always knew his own mind when he gave an order; but he was not imperious or domineering, and he rarely used the imperative mood. He believed that obedience was something that a religious gave rather than something the superior exacted. If he sent an order officially, he thanked the recipient for his generosity, when he acknowledged it, as if the subject had done him a favour when actually he had only given what in the nature of things he had no right to refuse. He carried almost to excess that delicacy of feeling which makes a ruler put himself in the subject's place. If he failed, it was in trusting others too much, and in crediting others with his own virtues which, though unconscious of them himself and taken for granted, he considered normal in ordinary human nature. He trusted everyone. He did it as a matter of course. He did not sav in the solemn, pompous manner of the heavy father: '**Now** I put you on your honour. I trust you. Be worthy of my trust.' He trusted others quite naturally and spontaneously, almost unconsciously, because he believed in human nature and the grace of God and human goodness. Such trust was sometimes misplaced, but it was only betrayed by those who could not but be conscious of their infamy and condemned in their own eyes.

What was most attractive in the character of Father Bede Jarrett was his sane, balanced, common-sense, human outlook. There were no oddities, idiosyncrasies or fads: no

displeasing peculiarities, nothing freakish or fantastic; he was extraordinarily ordinary (if the phrase may be allowed)—an example of normal, standard humanity gloriously perfect and yet utterly himself and unlike anyone else. His mannerisms, far from irritating, somehow added a force and grace to what he said. When you heard one of the younger brethren giving a realistic impersonation of an address by Father Bede—say, on ‘International Solidarity,’ you knew that the bright young humorist was not jeering or mocking, but unknowingly acknowledging that he had been himself impressed and had learnt more than he suspected.

He wore his virtues naturally without affectation; and yet he did not exactly ‘wear’ them. The word is inaccurate: his shining qualities were all so absolutely himself. There was nothing far-fetched or grotesque about him. He was always keen and alive and on fire, yet not fanatical. He sparkled with fun and humour, and was the soul of merriment in any group in which he found himself; he was witty yet never at the expense of charity. His sense of humour and his supernatural common-sense enabled him to tread for long the dangerous path of authority without being affected by its dangers. A stranger at an identification parade might easily have picked him out as a simple novice instead of the Dominican Provincial. Whatever he turned his hand to prospered, some of his dreams came true, and most of his works succeeded. He won popular applause and remained unspoiled by it. He was utterly without personal ambition. Great men meet and resist the temptation to ambition. Father Bede’s superlative greatness was that he never even seemed to experience the temptation. He had cut the ground from the feet of pride much deeper down. His natural gifts, his personal charm, eloquence, brilliance, energy and capacity for work seemed to mark him out for the highest honours in the Church, and he was talked of as a likely candidate whenever bishoprics were being filled. All who knew him knew where his heart was when such suggestions were made, and he would

say: 'You will see, I shall never wear a mitre or any other hat except this gay clerical tippet of mine.'

Father Bede's own inclination and equipment would have fitted him to become an eminent scholar of the first repute in historical research, yet this scholarly instinct was suppressed in the interests of more pressing apostolic work and the administrative cares of a religious superior. His contributions to historical study, *Medieval Socialism*, *The English Dominicans*, *Social Theories of the Middle Ages*, and his *History of Europe* bear the marks of having been written by a busy man; but the astounding thing is that such works could have been produced at all by one who was engaged in so much else. It is amazing to hear that the same Father Bede, the writer, was placed by a non-Catholic in a recent tribute as among the six greatest contemporary preachers of the world.

He, who deservedly won such popular applause outside, was, inside his priory, a model of silence and prayer such as may not be met in a lifetime again. He went out of his way to help and encourage any good work or scheme that others were planning or achieving. He was never bored, never down-hearted or depressed, never too busy to concern himself with the most unimportant interests of others. He was rigorously ascetic and was never known to take the dispensations from the fast which he so readily granted to others; but then he never asked anyone to do one tenth of what he was prepared to do himself. Actually at the time he was taken ill he was keeping the Lenten fast. This was all done naturally and as a matter of course, without any parade, or indeed without anyone's noticing it.

I very well remember the first time I heard Fr. Bede preach. It was at Woodchester in 1907. He was twenty-six and I was seventeen. The sermon was an entirely new experience. He gave me the impression as of an inspired boy, and that impression has always remained and been confirmed by my subsequent associations with him and provided a kind of clue to his personality. It is rare for a man to grow up into a glorious maturity and still retain all the charm and grace of youth: that is what Father Bede some-

how managed to achieve. He faced life as an adventure courageously and cheerfully with the keenness of a youth who could not be disillusioned. In 1920 he asked me to help him start this review. Armed with introductions I went round and interviewed all sorts of people—publishers, journalists, priests and others who I judged would be interested. The more persons I listened to, the more depressed I became. On every consideration, financial, journalistic, etc., etc., my scheme was condemned almost unanimously as unsound and foolish. On all sides I was sprayed gently but firmly with metaphorical cold water, and I came to Father Bede and said: 'Everyone tells me the thing will fail.' He said immediately: '*Let it fail!* Anyhow, get it started first. I would much sooner attempt it and fail than not attempt it at all.' The same spirit was manifest about a year ago when a difficult office **was** proposed to him which he could not accept because it was incompatible with his work at Oxford. 'As a problem it fascinates me and I would have loved it as an adventure,' he wrote in a letter.

Father Bede had a natural capacity for friendship and this, supernaturalized, became a force in his apostolic work. His was a nature responsive and affectionate: yet nearly all his life he was obliged to accept the loneliness of one in authority, and no one could have been more just or more opposed to anything having the semblance of **favouritism**.

A man of a frank simplicity, ready sympathy, cultured mind, earnest unaffected piety and a rare combination of qualities which suggest an almost flawless character—yet surely not anything that he achieved but what he *was* makes up the real greatness of him whose loss we mourn.

In the joyous character he so gracefully portrays of his Father and Patron in his *Life of St. Dominic*, Father Bede reveals his own ideals and gives us unconsciously a portrait of himself. We ask leave then to conclude this inadequate sketch with a quotation from that work which sums up his own life better than can any words of ours.

'It is a standing lesson to Christian souls that the amount and endurance **of** their work depends far more

upon the character which they have previously formed than on the years of labour that they put into life. Patiently, quietly should a man fashion and temper that sole real tool with which all that he does is finally achieved. The only thing or person on which he can always depend is himself; on himself, then, above all, must he concentrate. The preacher, the organiser, the administrator, is such in virtue of his own soul; because he has learnt to control himself, he can hope to control others; because he can set in order the household of his heart, he may dream of arranging in due and precise relation the affairs and work of others; only if he has found the way to God can he dare venture to lead others in the same pathway, since only he knows whither it leads. Only a man who has built carefully his character may hope one day to build the world “nearer to the heart’s desire.” ’

BERNARD DELANY, **O.P.**

SCHOOLS OF HOLINESS

III

ST. BERNADETTE SOUBIROUS

Star differeth from star in glory, says St. Paul, and we are well accustomed to variations, amounting sometimes almost to contradictions, in style and type and expression of holiness as exhibited by the lives of those whom the Church has officially pronounced to be saints, to be persons, that is, who are proved to have practised the Christian virtues—not on occasional impulse, but with such regularity as fairly deserves to be called habitual—in a heroic degree: in a degree (that means) which is conspicuously above what is recognized as constituting a normally good life. But even with this preparation one is scarcely ready to accept Bernadette of Lourdes as a saint, for at first sight (and perhaps increasingly with further acquaintance) her life presents