

EDITORIAL NOTES

Catholic Newspapers.

In *The Tablet* (October 24th, 1925) we read the following :

'Bad luck has once more spoilt a good idea. Father Bede Jarrett, our English Dominican Provincial, lately had the bright plan of "taking ten Catholics at haphazard and asking them two questions," namely :—

1. *Do you buy a Catholic weekly paper?*
2. *What chiefly do you buy it to read?*

Bows drawn at a venture are often drawn in vain, and many a bullet finds a wrong billet. This has been the Dominican Provincial's fate. His "haphazard" brought him ten pairs of replies, which are mostly so poor that it has required all Father Bede Jarrett's well-known literary skill to work them up into even a moderately readable article for *BLACKFRIARS*, the Dominican monthly. Indeed, his luck has been so bad that most of the respondents to his questionnaire seem to be minors. "The usual answer given to Question 1 was 'No, I don't buy it myself, but they usually take it at home.'" Here we have the minor's characteristic mixture of disdain and reverence for the Domestic Powers—for the mysterious "they." To Question 2 Father Bede Jarrett gives us four or five pages of answers. To be candid, they are hardly worth so many lines. As the whole article is composed on the bad principle of alluding vaguely and generally to the various Catholic papers and their contents instead of giving verifiable references, we cannot say how far the comments are just or unjust, in the main. There is, however, one allusion which we can identify, namely, some words about *The Tablet's* article "Of Lenten Pastorals" which appeared on March 1, 1924. The minor who has obliged the Dominican Provincial with his views upon this article turns out to be a man or woman who cannot even read; and therefore we will only say that we sympathise deeply with Father Bede Jarrett on the miscarriage of a happy thought. Perhaps he will try again. It would be useful if "they"—the Philistine plutocrats who put down their tuppences for the sprightly *Universe* and their sixpences for the ponderous *Tablet*—would give us their views.'

Blackfriars

This comment, we think, is an example of that vague allusiveness which is meant to pass as argument. Father Bede Jarrett's critic first says that 'most of the respondents to his questionnaire *seem* to be minors,' and then the criticism serenely ends up with the assured conviction that the respondents to both questions *were actually all* minors, for the critic says that it would be useful if 'they'—presumably the elders and *majores*—would give us their views.

The writer who has taken us to task rightly lays great stress on the need for an accurate reading of the words one is criticising. We respectfully recommend the practice of his own preaching to himself; and we ask him to re-read the last nine replies in Father Bede's article with this question at the back of his mind, 'Was this person a minor?' But,—*Distinguo minorem*.

But what is a minor? *The Oxford Dictionary* says that a minor is one who has not attained his majority, or, adjectively, it may mean a person of no importance, for instance a minor poet, and again it may mean the younger of two brothers in a school, as Jones minor. We may eliminate for the moment that delightful person, Jones minor; and we can only hope that the other two classes are strongly represented among the readers of Catholic newspapers. If they are not, then let editors examine their consciences. In any case, the gay, irresponsible young people with whom wily money-lenders will have no dealings and the vast crowd that makes up the ordinary ruck and run of humble folk (with votes but no ambitions to be editors) have at least a right to express their views.

It happens that Father Bede Jarrett's article on Catholic Newspapers in our October number, and the Editor's remarks on the same subject in August and September have brought letters from several readers. The correspondents do not state their ages; but we know that one is actually the Editor of a dignified and

responsible Catholic periodical. Therefore we set down extracts from their letters in the hope that they may provide views of the kind that *The Tablet* would consider useful.

One correspondent laments that

‘Unfortunately we have nothing in England to correspond to the *American Commonweal*, *America*, or *The Catholic World*. There is indeed *The Tablet*, but it is partly a newspaper and has no popular appeal such as these three have. It has a good literary standard; but if it is high it is also dry. . . . The word “press,” however, usually connotes newspaper press: and it is here that, in the opinion of many, the Catholics of England are badly served. The first business (would to Heaven it were the only business!) of a newspaper is to provide news: if a religious paper, religious news, primarily news of what Catholicism is doing. And this part of their job the English Catholic newspapers, with “stunts” after the manner of their secular contemporaries, do pretty well, if generally with little sense of proportion. For example, the Apostolic Constitution, *Umbratilem*, of last year is more important news than the speeches of half-a-dozen congresses; but it doesn’t get translated and printed. . . . The good news of Christianity at large, *Ego sum resurrectio et vita. Quærite ergo primum regnum Dei et iustitiam eius: et hæc omnia adjicientur vobis* still waits to be properly reported by the Catholic press.

‘Instead we get columns of unnecessary controversy. . . . The Editor of *The Sower* wrote recently: “I am convinced that Catholics themselves are very much bored by the torrential stream of controversy and trivial refutations which they are expected to attend to, and I think that this is one of the reasons why the circulation of various Catholic journals remains much less than it ought to be, in spite of unlimited opportunities and encouragements”; not only bored but rather scandalised as well. Anglican bishops, high church canons and modernist moderators can sometimes be very rude where the Catholic Church is concerned; but that is no reason why, when we have to take notice of them, we should treat them with less than unimpeachable courtesy and consideration. . . . It is one of the unfairest and most common breaches of charity to apply Catholic standards to the words and actions of non-Catholics or non-Christians who do not recognise the test. A religious

Blackfriars

paper should be religious, and ours are often simply sectarian, mightily concerned lest they 'give anything away' to their religious rivals. . . .

Another reason for the dreariness of Catholic newspapers is to be found in their fear of shocking their supporters (or financiers) by independent views outside matters of faith or morals. . . . A little plain speaking, a little space devoted to the expounding of independent and unpopular views, a little less co-operation with contemporary "stunts," a little less newspaper hero-worship, a little better manners, a little more of the temper of the Editor of *The Month* and less of that of the proprietors of *The Daily Express*, would increase the dignity, the usefulness and the Catholicity of our newspapers.

'Again, it is of no use trying "to cater for every class of reader." A weekly journal cannot be devotional, didactic, exegetical, a purveyor of social snippets, an authority on chess or cross-word puzzles, literary, directive, apologetical, apostolic and controversial all at once, in twenty-four pages, and for twopence or even sixpence a week, and still be a religious journal. . . . I do not believe that there is not a Catholic public for a religious paper; I do believe that there is not a religious paper for a Catholic public.'

Another correspondent who says he is not a Catholic, but sees and reads quite a number of Catholic papers, such as *The Universe*, *The Catholic World* and occasionally BLACKFRIARS and *Pax*, makes severe strictures. He says:

'I do think that there are very many earnest Catholics who would give their lives for the Conversion of England, and many are making strenuous and prayerful efforts towards that end. Yet I say in all sincerity that this can never happen until Catholics, I was going to say, become Christians; but what I mean is that not until Catholics as a whole show forth in their lives that spirit of Christianity without which we are none of His. Non-Catholics will take no notice of their appeal and will not be swayed by any theological discussions or verbal efforts to prove that the Catholic Church has in its keeping the keys of Heaven.'

This is putting the case at its worst, and it is extravagant, though no doubt sincerely meant. Father Bede Jarrett reminded us in his article that St. Francis de Sales has been chosen by the late Holy Father as

the patron of journalists. It was a maxim of the 'Gentleman-Saint' that more flies are caught with honey than with vinegar. If the Saint's spirit of kindness and charity prevailed more among those who are his official clients, and if Catholic journalists were more ready to win an opponent than to win a verbal victory, then the tone and temper of our newspapers would be different, the tempers of our critics would be sweeter and our opportunities for good would be boundless.

Pitt once asked, 'What is that makes an orator?' and he gave the simple answer, 'His audience.' We may adapt the question thus, 'What is it that makes a newspaper?' and answer, 'Its readers.' Catholics get the press they deserve, for Editors say they give the public what it wants. All criticism by Catholics of Catholic newspapers is self-criticism. Perhaps then the first step towards improving our newspapers is to improve ourselves.

Was William of Ireland an Irishman?

A correspondent writes :

'In BLACKFRIARS for July last is a paper ("A Causeway and a Cross") on the "Eleanor Crosses," a liberal part of which is devoted to "William of Ireland," the "Imaginator." The writer of the article says that William of Ireland was an Irishman. He seems not to quote from the original deeds, but from two other writers; and I venture to think the original is all in Latin, and that the French "de" has been retained as an integral part of his family name, as was common in England a century and more later than the date of the Eleanor Crosses.

'There was an English family of de Ireland, later Ireland, supposed to trace back to Lancashire; but a Thomas de Ireland was a witness to a Yorkshire deed in 1284. As a place name, the *Imperial Gazetteer* of 1872 gives Ireland a hamlet in the parish of Southills, Bedfordshire. There may have been other places of the name amongst the thousands of forgotten places; but one is enough to refute the assertion that William of (de) Ireland was Irish.'

Blackfriars

One can only say that the fact that there are tiny hamlets in England called Ireland would not prove conclusively that the aforesaid William did not come from the larger and more famous (or should we say notorious?) Ireland. Still, when we remember that Ireland is to this day a family name in Rutland and Northamptonshire, and that the writer of the article was dealing with the Eleanor Crosses of that part of the country, we see that there is point in our correspondent's suggestion. Names are certainly sometimes very misleading. The Irelands are more often than not English, the Welshes are Irish, French does not denote a Frenchman and the name English is common among Irishmen. After all, what's in a name?

Blackfriars or Black Friars?

Speaking of names, *The Tablet* (October 24) says:—'From Rome comes the query: Why sometimes "Black Friars" and at other times "Blackfriars" in references to Dominicans and Dominican life?' Both forms are certainly used to name the English sons of St. Dominic; but we imagine that only the compound form is used to indicate a building or the remains of a building, or a place with Dominican associations. Thus we have Blackfriars Bridge, Blackfriars Station and, in most of our large towns, we have generally a Blackfriars Street. *The Tablet* says "The Black Friars at Oxford live at Blackfriars, Oxford." We wish that many of our correspondents knew this. Some seem to think that we live at Blackwell's, since they insist on addressing their letters to 49 Broad Street. We may cap *The Tablet's* story about the dark-skinned community by saying that someone seriously asked if Blackfriars, Oxford, was an establishment for the dusky undergraduates from equatorial regions. There is another Blackfriars in Oxford, in the parish of St. Ebbe's, where the second Dominican Priory once stood. On account of the proximity of the gas-works (surely for no other reason) Preacher's Lane in this part has become Gas Street. When the Black Friars returned to Oxford some four years ago the Railway failed to deliver a large box addressed to Blackfriars, Oxford. Complaints brought the explanation that they had tried to deliver it in the Gas Street area. Then came the retort: 'Oh! we've moved, you know; we left there nearly four hundred years ago.'

THE EDITOR.