

FROM ONE WHO KNEW FATHER VINCENT AS A BOY.

Father Vincent was born at Portaferry, Co. Down, Ireland. Before his birth his mother offered him to St. Joseph and after his arrival she took him to the Church and, kneeling before St. Joseph's statue, dedicated him to the Foster Father of Jesus, asking him to 'do what he liked with the boy.' The family having removed to Belfast, Joe began his school days at St. Malachy's College—as a day-boy until 1882, when he entered as a boarder on account of his parents going to live in Newcastle-on-Tyne. He remained at the College until he was seventeen, when he entered the Novitiate at Woodchester.

He was always very studious and obtained several Exhibitions in the Irish Intermediate Examinations. Both at College and at home he was noted for his love of discussions and arguments, and he had ample scope for these with his brothers, who did not always agree with his views and not infrequently put him out of the room when they discovered that they were 'getting the worst of it.' Joe still stuck to his point of view. When quite a small boy, a President of the U.S.A. was assassinated, and his brothers were discussing the matter and wondering who would be the next President. One of them remarked that it was necessary to be a naturalised American citizen to be eligible for the office. Joe contradicted this and persisted in saying that *he* could be elected some day. As he refused to change his view he was, as usual, turned out of the room, still muttering, 'I could. I could.' His father, hearing the noise, arrived on the scene, and after learning the cause of the disagreement, said to Joe: 'What makes you think *you* could be elected President of the U.S.A.?' An unexpected answer came: 'If God willed it.' Of course this was re-echoed by a unanimous: 'Oh, we never thought of that.'

During his vacations much of his time was spent in visiting the Newcastle barracks, and making friends with the soldiers. He generally returned home with a fund of information about their family affairs, their wives, the number of children, and the wages that each one was getting. One summer when the family went for a month to Monkseaton (then a village), a mile from the sea and a quarter of a mile from the station, his delight was to be in the signal box, where he learned to signal up and down the line. The signalman once left him in charge for a short time, and several trains passed while he was 'on duty.'

When he was between 13 and 14 he was seized with the desire to know if a tramp whom he heard singing in the streets of Belfast

received much £ s. d. One dark-winter's evening he went out in the pouring rain and, disguised as a tramp, he sang until a policeman told him to move on or he would be locked up. He returned with sufficient cash to satisfy him that street singing was not a bad job.

Although he always possessed a greater love for prayer than his brothers, who often found his exterior acts of devotion tiresome, none of them surpassed him in boyish fun and mischief. He was always ready to join in all their escapades. When he decided to join the Dominican Order in England, he wrote to the President of St. Malachy's College, who had been his professor for years, and who afterwards became Bishop of Down and Connor. From him he received a very short letter, which contained the following words of disapproval: 'I give you six months.' (In actual fact the six months stretched out into fifty-four years!)

FROM A STUDENT OF FATHER VINCENT'S.

FATHER Vincent was the first Dominican Father to become one of the official lecturers of the University of London Extension scheme. The classes were held from 1921 in the Catholic Evidence Hut at Westminster and, for a period of twenty-two years, Father Vincent lectured weekly. In 1929 he relinquished the lectures on the *Summa Theologica* to another Dominican Friar and inaugurated at St. Peter's Hall a Diploma Course in the Literary, Historical and Comparative Study of the Bible, under the same University arrangement.

On the outbreak of war, the University of London closed the Extension Courses. But Father Vincent's little band of students felt that they needed more than ever the help and inspiration they received from his lectures; so the Scripture and the *Summa* Courses were continued in an old schoolroom next to St. Dominic's Priory, with Father Vincent as lecturer in both subjects. Here, through nights of deep black-out and often amid fierce anti-aircraft fire, the students gathered round their beloved teacher. In his company they were able to forget for a while the anxieties and madness of a world at war.

At Father Vincent's last lecture, on June 7th, 1943, ten days before he died, there were present students who had attended his first *Summa* lecture in 1920. One student had missed only one lecture during the last eighteen years. His pupils came from every walk of life—lawyers, civil servants, doctors, teachers, artists, milliners and cooks. Priests and nuns, non-Catholic clergymen, were often among his audience. Indeed, among his many examination

successes appeared the names of many who were not Catholics, and of at least one atheist. To Father Vincent they were all 'my students.' When they made a little presentation to him on his priestly Golden Jubilee, on September 19th, 1941, he told them: 'You are an unforgettable part of my life here, the longest part . . . You are part of the family in which I live. You, my dear students, have almost exaggerated in what you have said I gave you. I am sure I received more than I gave.' Then, referring to the nights of heavy bombing, he added: 'In months of awful anguish and dread of death, something in your quiet interest in the great things of truth was an inspiration to me. . . . Few will be called to go through what we have gone through in the past few years. I have passed through that with you.'

And what of Father Vincent's own record? In all those twenty-two years he missed only five lectures. He accepted no engagements which would prevent his being present at his class. Often he would cut short a retreat by one night, or make a special journey to town and back in order to keep his appointment with his students. Many times he dragged himself down, on foot, from the Priory to Westminster, when far stronger men would have allowed themselves to remain on a sick bed.

We love to think of him in the old Army hut, seated for a moment before he rose to talk, a pile of books before him. He always told his students: 'Read the Book. Don't read books about the Book. Read the Book.' But if he wished to quote a classical authority, the whole volume must be carried down, no matter how large or heavy; he would squeeze it into his old 'McNabb-sack' and hide it beneath his cloak. He never lectured on the Bible without bringing down the Greek and Latin, as well as the Douai translation. He always read aloud a chapter of the Book; this he considered the most important part of the lesson; and his pupils would have travelled miles just to hear him read it out. They never knew beforehand to what world of golden surprises he was planning to lead them. Deep incursions into mystical, social, moral questions would result from some simple query, when he stood up, outlined against the blackboard he loved to use, and asked, with his smile, 'Any questions?' His asides, which always had the appearance of chance remarks, were laden with the choicest fruit from his fertile brain, and 'question-time' became as stimulating and adventurous as the lecture itself.

On Monday in Holy Week, April 19th, 1943, Father Vincent came among his students as usual. He was finishing his twenty-four lecture course on the Psalms. A dominant theme of these lectures

had been that suggested by verse 1 of Psalm 88, 'The mercies of the Lord I will sing for ever.' And on that note of joy he quietly told his little flock that he was dying of an incurable disease of the throat. He offered to start a new *Summa* Course immediately after Easter, if they were willing to accept the uncertainty of the future. 'At any time,' he said, 'I may have to send a telegram to say that I am dead.'

On May 3rd Father Vincent began a Course of lectures on St. Thomas's treatise on the Angels. The students had asked for that subject, as the Angels were so soon to be his companions; but he said to one of them: 'I don't know what sort of angels they will put me among, dear child! I am not good enough to go among the good-angels.' After the sixth lecture, on June 7th, he told them that he would not give a lecture on Whit-Monday, but he added: 'We are all in God's hands, and if it is His will we will meet again on this day fortnight, June 21st.'

On that day fortnight, June 21st, a little group of his students did indeed gather round their beloved teacher once again; but it was to follow his body to its grave in Kensal Green. Did any of their sorrowing hearts take comfort from the memory of the words, he had spoken to them on his priestly Golden Jubilee, 'Little things are little things, but little beginnings may be great things. Little groups who have the words of Christ and who have the words of St. Thomas Aquinas will have their effect. This effect may not be seen before I am only a memory. It will be seen. It will be seen.'

D.F.

FROM THE APOSTOLATE OF CHRIST THE WORKER.

To thank Father Vincent, and to thank God for him, means to recall incidents, when his life particularly impressed itself on ours. One of these happy incidents occurred on Trinity Sunday, 1938, when our Parish Priest brought Father Vincent along to bless St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, a stone's throw from the Dominican Priory, London. There and then Father Vincent knelt down and kissed the floor of the hall. Ever since we have felt that in some hidden way St. Joseph's House had been adopted by him. We liked to speak of him as the 'Godfather' of the House. Only God and he know how much it owes him.

A Priest, whose assured scholarship and holy simplicity, whose uncompromising quest for reasoned Truth and childlike, unquestioning Faith so exquisitely blended, was singularly inspiring in a place where 'scholars and workers' mix and help each other.

One of those truths, which Father Vincent tried to bring home again and again in addresses, at Recollection days and retreats, was that :—

‘ Our relation to our neighbour will be the test by which we shall qualify for spending our Eternity with God ; that this relation is *focussed in Holy Mass as in nothing else.*’

His retreats, lectures and classes were refresher courses in the love of God and our neighbour. Nowhere were they more needed than in a House of Hospitality, where this neighbour of ours knocks at odd times and often under very odd appearances. It is good for us to remember Father Vincent, when we shrink from some unpleasant approach or when irritability threatens to blur the charity we wish to show.

Looking through the notes, taken during the past years, ‘ love of our neighbour ’ seems to demand that some of them be set down for the ‘ common good.’ Although these sayings reproduce conscientiously Father Vincent’s remarks, they ought to be looked upon rather as cherished reminiscences than as authoritative statements. He left us before his *Imprimatur* could be secured :

AUTHORITY.—Office *demand*s holiness, but does *not* confer it.

When authority keeps silence where it ought to speak, then it ceases to be authority.

Authority must be self-conscious, but never self-seeking.

Authority coupled with pride is worse than the devil.

LAW.—In the modern world, there is *much legislation*, but *little law*.

It is the great end of the law to make the citizen good.

SELF-CONQUEST AND SELF-SACRIFICE.—Not conquest is needed, but *self-conquest*.

The world to-day is suffering from the amount of sacrifice and the lack of self-sacrifice.

CONFESSION.—The Confessional is the safeguard of sanity.

Frank recognition of sin is the beginning of peace.

The ballot-box is not as important as the Confession-box.

GOD’S LOVE.—It needs divine Love to save human love.

The tears of Christ are entirely unselfish. They are not shed for the dread of his destiny. His tears almost dry other tears . . .

God’s tears are an insoluble mystery. They show the exquisite tenderness of his Love.

God is never up-to-date ; He is up to *Eternity*.

C. M. SPITZ.

FROM LADY PHIPPS.

I HAD the good fortune to be received into the Church by Father Vincent thirteen years ago, and since then I saw him every year several times. At the beginning of my life as a Catholic I think I took him for granted and I imagined that all priests would be like him. Only gradually did I come to see he was like no one else.

To go and see him never became for me an easy or an ordinary affair. With all his sympathy there was something very awe-inspiring about him. His simplicity and directness and the quality of absolute certainty of his faith made him rather like a clean glass window letting in a bright daylight in which no half-tones, nor shades, no hesitations nor timid indecisions could feel at home.

I think I must have learnt almost as much from his silences as from what he said. He never expressed disapproval nor spoke a word of criticism, but very often when I came to him full of perplexities and anxious questions, I found myself instead listening (perhaps reluctantly) to words that did not seem to apply to me or my affairs at all. But on thinking it over afterwards I never once failed to see that I had really been answered.

In guidance his hand was the lightest and kindest possible. He could hardly be called a Director, for his great humility made him seem to be going along the same road as oneself instead of leading the way. Yet he never let me off anything difficult nor suggested the easy way out, and I think I speak truly when I say that perhaps it was for that I valued him so much as a guide.

In the bracing air that surrounded him the conviction that it was impossible not to try to keep up to a high standard became natural, compelling, even romantic. For he succeeded in making Duty take on the appearance of a chivalrous adventure and he brought a poetry all his own into the faithful carrying out of trivial daily tasks—darning, baking, planting a cabbage. To hear him once in a Retreat speak of the parable of the patch on the torn garment made me feel that he loved that piece of stuff, the small stitches each in place, the smoothness of the patch, even the needle and thread.

He seemed to understand particularly well how women's lives are bound up with the household objects that serve them. That understanding expressed itself in an affectionate reverence towards so-called insignificant inanimate things like a scrubbed floor, a well-scoured saucepan, a mended shoe. Poverty, as he saw it, makes the link closer between the humble things in a home and their users, and that relationship is spoilt by unnecessary possessions.

Poverty and Motherhood were nearly always spoken of together,

and both of them meant Nazareth to him. For the sake of that Family, that Home, all homes became holy places.

His well-trained and scholarly mind could go soaring up into the theological meaning of the mysteries of the Faith, but it never failed to come straight back to lavish what he had gathered and stored in those heights on humble mothers toiling in their homes. And so I can say that for me that was his great and, I pray, his lasting message. Ever since I came into the Church he made me understand more and more fully the vocation of Mothers.

To end I will set down those words of his which stand out most clearly in my memory, owing to the special and slightly mysterious emphasis with which they were spoken, followed by the injunction to remember them after he was gone.

'Remember this, the celibate Priesthood only exists for the sake of the family. Without homes that Priesthood would have *no point at all.*'

I think he had in his mind while he spoke, the thought of all those poor homes round Haverstock Hill, where he was the trusted friend of many a hard-working Mother. And listening to him, I seemed to see the bond between the great work of Priests and the humble work of Mothers. It is for that I thank him, for the knowledge he brought so beautifully home to me, that the Church is built round a Family.

FRANCES PHIPPS.

FROM ST. JOAN'S ALLIANCE.

FATHER Vincent McNabb once said, during the Votes for Women campaign, that he was not an advocate of women's suffrage, but added that it was only because he was not a politician. Among the most treasured archives of St. Joan's Social and Political Alliance are his letters of encouragement, of which one paid this society a high compliment: 'Catholic you began, Catholic you thought and fought, and after twenty-five years of thinking and struggling, Catholic you remain.' As a Catholic theologian, Father McNabb repeatedly gave his advice and support to St. Joan's, especially in its work of opposing sterilisation, whether voluntary or compulsory, artificial birth control, and the regulation of prostitution. In particular, during the two wars, by writing for the Alliance's paper and by speaking at one of its meetings, he set forth the theological and moral objections to Regulation 40D and its successor, Regulation 33B. On April 23rd, 1936, the fiftieth anniversary of the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, he said Mass in thanksgiving, as a gift.

Feminism has never been honoured, or humbled, as Father Vincent honoured and humbled it when he said, at a dinner given to the Prime Minister of Australia and Dame Enid Lyons in 1937: 'But here I have sat for an hour by a fountain of hope—the women! God who provided the mother has provided the women's movement.' He appealed to women to 'purify these cast-off garments of men.' Saint Joan's Alliance has no holier memory than that of the Mass which this Friar Preacher offered for it on its twenty-first birthday.

HELEN DOUGLAS-IRVINE.

A PENITENT OF FATHER VINCENT writes :—

To write of Father Vincent's stark asceticism would be a breach of those good manners and delicacy of touch which were so natural to him and which he so much appreciated in others. He deprecated and took pains to avoid singularity in all things that matter; though this was often misunderstood. When dying we are told he repeated several times the word of St. Peter, the great spokesman of humanity: 'Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee'; and our stricken minds can almost reconstruct this dialogue between the disciple's soul and his Master in that final hour. On one occasion he had spoken on this text, and said: 'Life can hardly be said to have begun until "Lovest thou me?" has been asked us. Our spiritual life has begun only when we can answer, "Lord thou knowest . . ."' It is the question death will ask us.' By Father Vincent's wish this sublime answer of the soul is inscribed on his coffin. It seems the natural one for him whose prayer raised him to those heights from which all souls must shrink; and who wrote shortly before he died: 'Gird me, my crucified Lover, take me from ways of my own seeking, that my very death may glorify thee—speak to me the word Love—ask me again and again of my love.'