

BIOGRAPHY OF FATHER BEDE
JARRETT, O.P.¹

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COLONEL Jarrett's six sons all went to school at Stonyhurst. Cyril² was sent there in the autumn of 1891 at the age of ten, and spent his first year at Hodder Place.

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In all his Stonyhurst notes there is scarcely a sentence or even a word deleted. Neither is there a superfluous word, nor an aside by the pupil to himself, nor any marginal comment, pictorial or verbal, such as schoolboys sometimes use when anything distracts them pleasantly or unpleasantly from their work. No thought of himself, or of his master or school fellows was allowed to come between him and his appointed task. Then, as later, he seems to have had a rare gift of becoming wholly and pleasantly absorbed in the work that lay before him as the duty of the moment. Perhaps he had already the still rarer gift, for which he became so remarkable in later years, of calmly dropping that duty, however absorbing it might become, the moment the next duty called, and of as calmly resuming it again the next time its turn came round, just as if there had been no interval or interruption. This power of becoming absorbed, wholly, agreeably and impersonally, in any present duty seems to have been a family trait. His older brothers had it, though not so perfectly as he. They sometimes indulge in semi-humorous illustrations, relevant but not necessary to the text; he never under any circumstances strays from the point, or uses any but the strictest and simplest economy of means to get there. And he kept that simple directness all his life, and in every-

¹ Extracts from the official *Life*, by Fr. J. B. Reeves, O.P., which is in course of preparation.

² Later Father Bede, O.P.

thing. He never aimed beyond his reach, and never sought any means to achieve his aim except those that lay naturally to hand; and of those he chose the plainest.

His deep and serious sense of duty was entirely free from all priggishness and from all morose solemnity. At Stonyhurst, as in early childhood, he was talkative, playful, inquisitive and in every way spontaneously boyish. He was also, as always, intensely romantic. These traits were disciplined before his character developed to its maturity, but they were never exorcised as though evil in themselves. Sound common sense and an ambition to achieve the best gained control of them all, and harnessed and harmonised them all, without extinguishing or even diminishing any of them. The boy as he grew into a man pursued pleasure less and less, and duty more and more; but even from boyhood he was disciplined by others, and further disciplined himself, to find in duty his greatest pleasure, and still to find it a very great pleasure indeed to be off duty. Boy and man, he knew as well as anyone how to take a holiday from seriousness and relax into his natural, innocent talkativeness, playfulness, curiosity and romanticism.

A hint of the kind of boy he was during his last year at Stonyhurst is to be found in the pocket-book he received as a prize for winning the sack-race. Inside the back cover he kept a current account of the way he was laying out his pocket money. It runs:

Paper, etc.	2/-
Magazine	2/6
Fry's caramels	6d.
Eau de Cologne (p's)	1d.
Pay for Club ticket	7/6
Blotting paper	1d.
Gum paper	2d.
Rescue Society	1/-
Poor box	2d.
Apples, &c.	1/-
Sweets, &c.	2/3
Tarts, &c.	8d.
Caramels	6d.

During his school years his parents were still in India. When they came on leave to England, unless their sons' holidays coincided with their visits, they would go to Stonyhurst and stay some time at the Shireburn Arms, near the Hurst Green entrance to the College Grounds. Here their boys came to spend their free afternoons, and brought their friends to be suitably entertained. Most of Cyril's school holidays were passed in the country houses of his parents' friends. One of these was Frensham Place, the home of the Woodroffes, where there was a Chapel served by Dominicans. To this family, and that of Francis Mathew, who married into it, Cyril remained bound by ties of closest friendship to the end of his life. They remembered him during his summer holidays between his leaving Stonyhurst and going to Woodchester as 'a quiet boy of seventeen, intensely sensitive, embarrassingly shy amongst strangers, romanticist.'

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Early in August, 1898, almost immediately after leaving Stonyhurst, Cyril Jarrett presented himself at St. Dominic's Priory, London, and asked to be received into the Order of Preachers as a Member of the English Province.

It was arranged that he should go to the noviciate at Woodchester for the annual community retreat beginning September 14th, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. He arrived with two days to spare and spent that time in making himself at home in his new surroundings and amongst his new companions. Of the six young men who joined the Province that year, he was the youngest but one.

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At the end of the retreat Cyril received the monastic tonsure and Dominican habit, and with them the religious name of Brother Bede—or Friar Bede, as he ever after preferred it in his signature.

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In his healthy young days at Woodchester, prompt and early rising cannot have been any easier for him than it is for ordinary mortals; but without doing any violence to nature he formed in his youth so firm and strict a habit of issuing bright and fresh first thing in the morning that in after years, during long periods of overwork and sleepless nights, he showed no signs of fatigue or weariness when, fresh from his cold bath, he came down to the first monastic duty of the day, with unfailling regularity, and with never the least sign of having had to hurry. He was never under any circumstances known to stretch himself out to rest during the daytime. In nearly all the small observances of outward decorum in which novices are exercised he persevered to the end of his days, making them part of the general good manners which he brought with him from home and school into the cloister. For instance, novices are taught to kneel upright in their stalls with their hands under their scapular, and arms resting lightly on the bench in front of them; to wear their hood over their head when sitting at table in the refectory; never to cross their legs when sitting. With Father Bede such attitudes became an unaffected, graceful habit out of which he never lapsed.

Novices have to perform a number of light manual duties, such as making their own beds, cleaning and tidying their own cells and sometimes the Novice Master's, scrubbing floors, brushing carpets, polishing brass and woodwork, and generally attending to the menial offices necessary for plain and clean living where there are no servants. High-minded youth is sometimes contemptuous of such tasks, and clumsy at them. With Brother Bede neatness and tidiness became the perfect art in which art is concealed and all seems perfectly natural. His cell and his person were always spotless, and that not as a result of much scouring and polishing, but of the prompt order and economy with which he disposed of everything he laid hands on. Voluntary poverty, as he understood it and

practised it—and from his first days in the cloister he studied its meaning intelligently and practised it perfectly—meant simplifying life as far as possible in all directions, but without niggardliness. His things were always good enough to be serviceable and presenable, whether they were things to wear or things to use. He never kept more of them than strict necessity required; and he never let anything fall carelessly from his hand, but put back each smallest object, when it had served its turn, in the place his orderly mind had assigned to it. In all this again he was natural and unaffected, and free from the least trace of foppery or punctilious formalism.

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The routine of his noviciate was a full one, but it left him scope for his own tastes and ambitions. His pocket-book shows clearly in what direction these were already firmly set. He followed up his newly inspired interest in St. Bede by copying out the principal dates and events in the lives of St. Wilfred, St. Cuthbert and St. Benet Biscop. He also made a very brief outline of the history of the Dominicans in England from 1250 to 1400. From his reading he copied out, under the title 'Intellect, the Instrument of Religious Training':

' . . . in this world ability and talent are often opposed to virtue. The Church founded Universities to join what before was joined by God, but separated by man. The learned layman ought to be devout, and the devout ecclesiastic learned.'

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On August 30th, 1900, Brother Bede and five other Novices were moved from Woodchester to Hawkesyard Priory, near Rugeley, Staffordshire.

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In the students' chronicle which he kept at Hawkesyard one easily traces the rapid development of his mind and character between the age of twenty and twenty-two. His

predominant interest throughout is in the religious and professional life of his Order; its liturgy, its ascetic observances, its studies, its history, its progress. On every great Feast having a special ceremonial he describes concisely but minutely how well or ill the services have been carried out. At first there is a strong note of pleased approval when things go well, of chagrin when they go amiss. Gradually this note becomes more restrained, but it persists.

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But in his twentieth year, when these passages were written, he was still boy enough to expect others to be already perfect in everything in which he aspired to become perfect himself. The romantic ideal of Dominican perfection, which first brought him to the Order and which he was never to abandon, was not yet tempered with the practical wisdom and knowledge of human nature that he was to acquire later. He had seen it very nearly realised among the older generation of Dominicans he first knew, and recognised it in many of the senior brethren still living. But he was disappointed and bothered not to find it ready made and flawless in every one of his brethren, the youngest as well as the oldest, for he had not yet thought of any other way to his own perfection except the rapid assimilation of himself to the pattern of others already perfect. He knew that his soldier-brothers, immediately they joined their regiments, would find all their seniors already drilled to one perfect pattern, and would be very quickly drilled into it themselves. He had yet to learn that Religious life is really a life, not a mere martial service; a gradual and painful and oftentimes blundering growth of many diverse characters into one heart and mind, not a dragooning of many units into an *esprit de corps* that each may wear outside his real character like a uniform, and yet pass muster. At twenty Brother Bede was not yet a leader or a pioneer, but a very humble follower of others. But at twenty-one the spiritual crisis that obliged him to become the follower

of a very select few and the leader of many was already upon him. At this stage of his development he might very easily have degenerated into a snob and a prig, had it not been for the two virtues which never failed him; his genuine humility and his boyish sense of humour. His innocent, almost impish spirit of fun was ever ready to assume a solemn air and mock at all spurious solemnity, especially his own. Even his mood of fault-finding was a prankish mood. He could skit his own virtues.

JOHN-BAPTIST REEVES, O.P.

(It is hoped to be able to publish further extracts in succeeding issues)