

DOMINIC AND FRANCIS IN THE NEW WORLD

I AM not over-assured as to the happiness of my title. For the New World, especially of late, is becoming more like the Old World to which we look for tradition. Indeed, I would venture the opinion that the eagerness on the part of the Old World to shed her ancient traditions is paralleled only by the desire of thinkers in the New World to gather up the best lessons of European history before they perish.

Again, I fear that territorially, at any rate, I am going to be confined to a very small and, if we are to credit authoritative American critics, a very unrepresentative portion of the New World—New York City. Personally I am satisfied with the conviction that New York is American and of the New World; for only America could produce New York City.

Furthermore, centuries before the happenings of the facts which I try to appreciate here, practically the whole of the New World knew Dominic and Francis. It knew these thirteenth century patriarchs of religion through the numerous friars who, together with the intrepid sons of the great Ignatius, preached the faith in Northern and Southern America. Your American high-school child, Catholic or Protestant, knows the associations of the friars with Christopher Columbus even as he knows the history of the civilizing influences of the Jesuits, especially in North America.

As a matter of fact a source of bewilderment to me, after many years spent in the United States, is exactly why the term 'New World' is applied to-day to the vast lands lying on the other side of the Atlantic. Only a superficial observer could deny the statement that America (and here I mean the United States) clings to much that is best in European tradition: that if it has discarded some good things of the Old World, then this has been in a rather rushed effort

to be freed from the policies and injustices that have brought such misery to the older nations.

It is precisely because the real America (and this is by no means the America of the 'tabloids' or the 'movies') is deeply appreciative of all that is best in European culture that it was able to appreciate, and this very coherently, the late Father Bede Jarrett of the Order of Preachers and Father Alfred Barry of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin of St. Francis.

What, I respectfully submit, was grasped in their native England, only after some lengthy period, was grasped almost at first glance on the other side of the ocean: that here were two distinct types, yet true types of the twin idealisms to which Catholic Europe had given birth. And that fact was understood so fully that not only the thoughtful Dominican or Franciscan would look with marked respect to Father Bede or to Father Alfred and carefully weigh their words when these two friars spoke of their respective ascetic principles, but the studious and pious layman too would instinctively feel that he was in intimate touch, through their personalities, with the spiritual traditions that gave vitality to mediaeval Catholicism. Yes, and the activities of the two friars gave fresh impetus to the conviction that these same spiritual traditions are sorely needed by our tired civilization.

Father Bede and Father Alfred were of practically the same age. They were together at Stonyhurst until the future Franciscan left to spend a further four years at the Oratory School, then in Birmingham. Both were products of homes whose spirit was essentially Catholic; both studied at Oxford and, curiously enough, both worked in America about the same time. I do not know whether they were close friends; they were not accustomed to speak at any length about their friendships. This much, however, is true; had their lives been thrown together more closely they must indeed have become fast friends, for both were united in a deep reverence for tradition and each would have looked to find in the other an objective illustration of that tradition. The Franciscanism which Father Bede

knew and appreciated as a scholarly historian, he would have found and admired in Father Alfred; the powerfully apostolic Dominicanism that Father Alfred knew, he would indeed have discerned in Father Bede.

As it was, they were laboriously engaged in directing their respective communities at Blackfriars and Greyfriars when death called them. And it is striking how each, in his manner of death, was able to illustrate a favourite axiom, differently worded, yet substantially identical. The Dominican never wearied of insisting upon the apostolic duty of ' spending and being spent ' in the cause of Christ; the Franciscan's cry, often uttered to an over-burdened fellow-friar, was: Better to burn out than to rust out.

I confess that it was with a newly-awakened critical spirit and, so to speak, under the pressure of frequently heard American judgement and freely expressed comment on the character of the two men that I began to think of them as veritable types. In England I would have taken them for granted. To illustrate the spirit of the religious Founders whose habits they wore I should instinctively have turned over the pages of history. In America it was forced upon me that the exact illustrations were there, in flesh and blood, word and deed.

A first American impression of Father Bede. He was preaching before a crowded audience in New York City. Most assuredly he *looked* the part: the ascetic friar come from close application to study and strict observance of conventual life. But one had heard such stories, absolutely false stories, of failure in America to welcome culture on platform or in pulpit that one queried whether the magisterial dignity of Father Bede would find happy acceptance. During the first sermon of a lengthy course all doubts were dispelled. And this in spite of the fact that it was openly acknowledged that it was no use hearing the Dominican unless one were prepared to work; to think whilst he was speaking and to think a great deal more when he was finished. His short sentences—sometimes they were *staccato* sentences—were obviously, on his part, the fruit of a determination to utter the truth and nothing but the truth.

His personal faithfulness to the great Dominican ideal, *Contemplare et alii contemplata tradere*, was proved by every word that passed his lips. There could be no doubt in the mind of his hearer that Father Bede had made exhaustive study in the preparation of his discourse: his intimate friends have testified to the fact that he raised that study, by way of prayer, to the level of active contemplation.

Another impression. As director of a small but very fervent group of Franciscan Tertiaries in New York, it was my privilege to be closely associated with him during the Retreat which he had been invited to conduct. Although already fatigued by other exacting duties (he had been preaching three or four times a day for many weeks preceding), the thoroughness of his preparation and method of approach was most edifying. To the very well-springs of Franciscan Tertiary life he went with unerring instinct. No son of Francis could have given more eloquent testimony to the original inspiration of the Third Order.

So, too, in Seminaries, in Convents of various religious, it was his custom, never varied, to seek out the original ideal, to estimate that ideal in its Catholic setting, and then to create the standards of devout living. Knowing what the Church expects, what he himself could rightfully expect through the ecclesiastical approbation of a particular way of life, he poured forth an unceasing stream of logical conclusions.

Father Bede's intellectualism was evidently the result of a life-long desire to enter into the spirit of the intellectualism of St. Thomas. He offered one the studied truth and if, on occasion, there were some who found his method cold, then that was precisely because they failed to follow up his thought and to come to the experimental realization of the fact that there is a way to the heart that lies through the intellect. Father Bede left the serious soul inspired to pray thoughtfully; he knew, with his beloved Aquinas, that soon the same soul would pray ardently.

Add to this the courteous refinement of his nature, the obvious sincerity of his attitude towards a *bona fide* in-

quirer after truth, the infinite patience with which he would listen to the exposition of a thesis which he could not adopt, the complete trust in the good intention of those who approached him on matters relating to the soul, and you have the Father Bede Jarrett whose presence and words could arouse enthusiastic admiration in the United States.

Naturally, it was from a more intimate association with Father Alfred that I came to the study of his particular appeal to the American people. His career in the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin had taken him to far different experiences. From Oxford he had gone to the Navy and had served as Chaplain during practically the whole of the War. The reading of his War Diary, which he never intended for other eyes, reveals him to have been, during the hard days of the Mediterranean campaigns, exactly what he was in America. Unlike Father Bede he wrote no books, though he did publish parts of his masterly studies of Gallicanism and Jansenism.

Father Alfred's life was essentially active. It was remarkable to what extent he could use unto profit the refinement and culture, and, to say the least, the appreciation of a scholar, which he shared with his Dominican contemporary. One sensed the background of the Franciscan, whether he was on the lower deck or in the stoke-hold of a battleship, in the slums of London or New York, in the drawing-rooms of the more favoured members of society. Stonyhurst and the Oratory did indeed play part in his formation. They presented excellent material to the Franciscan Order for the fashioning of the gentle, courteous priest who was at perfect ease in offering spiritual advice to every class of society.

Like Father Bede, he was unquestionably a man of prayer. One notes in his War Diary, with moving pity for his poor worn frame, that even when sickening for typhoid or slowly recovering from some malady contracted in the East, a joyous (the medicos called it foolish) anticipation of celebrating his Mass.

In America he was immediately recognized as being like

to Father Bede in many ways: yet the differences between the two men were also noted. Father Alfred made direct appeal to the heart. His discourses, perhaps, were never as logically thought out as were those of Father Bede. It was not the Franciscan's formal intention that it should be so, yet it was the actual fact he emphasized, the value of the deed rather than the value of the truth. When Father Alfred preached or conducted Retreats it was a personality formed by prayer and penance that immediately confronted his audience and led it to yield its heart. But once sympathetic hearing had been given to his words and the heart had yielded to his pleadings, one found oneself in the possession of the identical crystallized truths that formed the starting-point of the learned Friar-Preacher.

Pray ardently and you will come to pray thoughtfully. That was the result of Father Alfred's teaching. In this, he appealed to the American mind as exemplifying the traditional attitude of Franciscanism.

It is difficult to forget the keen appraisal of spiritual characteristics that the American mind gave to the two friars. It saw, and rightly saw in Father Bede, the living witness to the spirit of St. Dominic made expressive through ceaseless, prayerful application to St. Thomas Aquinas; in Father Alfred it saw an attractive example of the ardent Christian love that derives, through St. Bonaventure, from the authentic source—the Poor Man of Assisi. I do not exaggerate. Again and again I heard the two compared, and compared with delightful understanding of the great streams of asceticism whose founts date from the thirteenth century.

In their American apostolate they moved in practically the same circles though not during the same periods; both expressed themselves in the carefully chosen language of the cultured Englishman; both, I may add, were immediately recognised as English to the core, yet, in the light of their apostolate their nationality was not considered: only the worth of the message they so eagerly brought.

They died as they would have desired to die: in the height of activity, upholding, each in his own sphere, an

ideal sincerely believed to be intimately connected with the larger ideal that had attracted their youth. Father Bede had lived to see his beloved Blackfriars established, and assuredly promising a continuous stream of young brethren passing from the academic peace of Oxford, fully armed with the Thomism which he knew to be so powerful a weapon in warfare upon error. Father Alfred had lived to see Greyfriars erected, and he could die conscious of the fact that within its walls he had earnestly set up a tradition in strict accord with the Franciscan Gospel of life; he had left the need for a further carrying of the burden of poverty in spite of his long struggles and activities in the interests of the University house, yet during his administration he had done nothing—to quote the Franciscan Rule—‘to extinguish the spirit of holy prayer and devotion to which all temporal things ought to be subservient.’

It was strange that the two men should have died so close together and holding almost identical offices in their respective Orders. Catholic Oxford certainly lost much in their going.

Catholic America expressed its own loss in no equivocal language, and in the many references to their deaths Catholic America gave yet more evidence of a spirit that must make it great and must win it admiring recognition on this side of the Atlantic.

For, I repeat it, America, and especially Catholic America, eagerly welcomes all that is best in European culture. To-day, its spirit of appreciation is walking hand in hand with a careful discernment, a discernment that becomes less capable of error with the passing of every year. Catholic America associates itself at once with every cause that bears the hall-mark of its apostolic origin, and offers to that cause an earnest service and devotion that we, apparently, cannot arouse. Small wonder that many have said (Canon Barry said it years ago, when the Church in America was far less of a power than it is to-day), after reviewing the phenomenon that is American Catholicism: ‘To Europe belongs the past: to America the future.’

Such a sentiment may lead to controversy. I do not mind

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the controversy so long as it is based upon facts. Personally I am tired and not a little disheartened by the murmurs that sometimes greet any high evaluation of American endeavour in any sphere: 'Yes! it is all very enthusiastic, isn't it, but doesn't it burn itself out rather quickly?'

Easy enough to say that: a most comfortable method of removing any uneasiness that may be the result of a comparison with the appalling lack of response from which we suffer here. But you cannot dismiss the manifestation of Catholicism in the United States with so light a word or gesture when, over a very long period, you see its Contemplatives multiplying, its Missionary Colleges filled to overflowing, its Houses of Retreats attracting thousands of devout laymen, its fearless attitude towards any State policy that threatens the faith (witness those magnificent editorials of Father James Gillis, C.S.P.), its churches crowded every morning, its Altar rails filled

As for myself, I know I can offer American Catholicism nothing but reverent admiration. And that admiration is naturally intensified when I remember the spiritual fruitage, in New York City alone, of the apostolate of that typical Friar Preacher, Father Bede Jarrett, and the wistful expressions of personal loss uttered by the hundreds of men and women who still remember unto spiritual confidence the exhortations of my beloved brother in St. Francis, Father Alfred Barry.

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