

BIOGRAPHY OF FATHER BEDE
JARRETT (V)¹

IN June, 1914, when he had been six years an active member of the Dominican community in London, Father Bede's brethren elected him their Prior. He was unusually young for such an office—only thirty-three. To his other duties was now added the heavy responsibility of governing a community of religious men, priests and lay-brothers, and exercising authority and jurisdiction over them according to the Dominican Constitutions in all matters spiritual and temporal.

'As you can guess,' he wrote to a friend who had sent him congratulations, 'it is all rather distasteful to me, so that I should be grateful for your prayers when you have any to let.'

Scarcely had he entered upon this new phase of his life when the European war broke out. England entered into it on the Feast of St. Dominic, August 4th.

He published in the *Rosary Magazine* a translation of the prayers *pro pace*, ordered by the Cardinal, and added:

'All our thoughts are preoccupied with the war. Waking, it is perhaps our first thought, and sleeping our last. We have each of us friends and relations who have gone off to their ships or regiments to do battle for their country's cause, and there are the far larger number of those who, at home, live the more difficult life of peace. Prayer, of course, must take a very large place in our energies. But we must add to that the activities of practice.'

He then points out 'countless ways in which we can help': making garments for soldiers and wounded and for the poor at home, 'whose needs this year will be in excess

¹ Further extracts from the forthcoming *Life of Father Bede Jarrett, O.P.*, by John-Baptist Reeves, O.P.,

of normal years.' He especially appeals to his readers to show thought for others and not seek their own convenience at the cost of others' pain. 'Take as your motto: no panic, no selfishness, deeper spiritual life.'

Then turning to discuss the war as the most urgent of present problems, he says:

'We cannot but contrast the attitude of Christ and the attitude of Christians. We see Him throughout the Gospel story so gentle to the bodies of men From that love for men's bodies, which are the temples of the Living God, we turn to the grouped nations at war, to the scenes of fighting, the piled-up heaps of stricken and dead. Our thoughts are of the boys whom we have known and watched growing, their limbs hardening, not yet attaining their full strength; these, we say to ourselves, are being torn by shot, mangled by shell. Is it not natural that we note the pathos of it all, the oppressing sorrow? Then humanly we turn to see what comfort we can gain from it all, for our nature is too full of eager optimism to stay for long staring blankly at sorrow. At once we see certain obvious advantages that the war has brought about. We notice that the clamour of Irish voices has been hushed into silence at the sound of guns. The women's suffrage question that had reached such a stage that none could see a way out, the strife between labour and its employers, which was in much the same state, have been temporarily removed from the sphere of active hostility The selfish greed of those who had first bought up, against the poor, all the provisions that were to be had, was denounced immediately and unanimously by the whole of public opinion in England. The huge sum raised for the Prince of Wales' Fund, the prompt offer of homes for the wounded soldiers, etc., all betoken a growing sense of the oneness of the nation and the realisation that all the differences of caste and class were the superficial luxuries of peace.'

'Now looking back at the days before, we repeat to ourselves that had not "distraction" come we should anyway have had the upsetting of the whole social structure of the nation. It was bound to come; inevitable. The price of it has been, will be, terrible. But now that the old things have gone, it will be our endeavour to see that never again as far as we can help shall things be allowed to drift back into the state in which they were before. The misery of war is horrible; but were not the slums of our towns, the destitution of our pauper population, the

pinched faces of our starved victims of a war even yet more terrible because age-long, without the gleams of heroism that make death a thing of greatness, without pomp, without public recognition, without order of merit or of distinguished service? There was never a reward save the accolade of the Angel of Death.'

'We talk glibly,' he wrote in November, 'of what is to happen when the war is over, and what provision must be made that never again shall Prussian militarism have a chance of rousing the antagonism of Nations. This is all very well. But there are dangerous symptoms of a cure that shall be worse than the disease. Some of our enthusiastic journalists, so wrought upon by the inflammatory nature of their own elaborate eloquence, are already beginning to speak of the advance of England as the greatest military power in the world. Now this won't do. We are surely not going to destroy one military power merely to supplant it by another Our social needs are crying for remedy; let us make sure that they do not cry for vengeance. Let us, who have to stay at home, prepare our own schemes for the settlement of our own problems, so as to be ready to face the reaction that will follow upon the war Let us appoint popular commissions to investigate and remedy the atrocities—not of war, but of peace.'

In February, 1915, he reminds the readers of *The Rosary Magazine* to remember

' . . . those mothers who are making their offerings of sons . . . for it is not those who offer their lives but those who offer their sons that make the larger sacrifice.'

He prays that

He Who made the Great Sacrifice would instil into the hearts of those who go the reason for their going. Let them not set off as though intoxicated with the triumph of war or its glory, or the admiration of their women-folk, but rather conscious only that they go to defend their own shores against a vigorous and wanton foe. There is precious little glory nor much prospect of spectacular triumphs; there is only unrelieved darkness. Nay, not real darkness, for out from it shines the Light of the World. O Master of men, may Thy light shine upon us all, to make clear our judgments, to moderate our counsels so that they contain no spirit of revenge, to nerve us to the last sacrifice of life for what we hold to be the right.'

He suggests that Rosarians should devote their five daily decades respectively to those left behind at home, those engaged in war, to nurses and doctors, the dead, and a just and honourable peace.

Already by this time the war had brought him his own private sorrows: school friends and Scouts who were very dear to him had been stricken down. But now death began to come to his own flesh and blood. His eldest brother, Charles, now aged forty, was killed in Gallipoli on April 27th, 1915. His brother Aylmer, aged thirty-five, died on June 22nd, 1915, of wounds received in Flanders. In his public writings from the month of April onwards there is a sudden and ominous silence about deaths in war and suffering at home. Of his private letters to friends very few have survived from this period, but in such as have there is complete silence about his private griefs. When in August, 1915, he again mentions the war, he makes a beginning which shows where his thoughts have been during his months of silence:

‘The Incarnation is the canonisation of human friendship. We learn by It that there is in friendship the sole stay in life; and in its severed ends life’s sole sorrow. All our joys are glad-some to us because of someone else; and if there is no way of expressing to that other our sorrows and our joys, by silence or by speech, then we are lonely indeed, for “it is not good for man to be alone.”

‘In the Chronicle of Nicholas Trivet, an English Dominican born about 1250, we read that in the great war in Toulouse Simon de Montfort fought and St. Dominic prayed . . . Pray then hard for peace, such as shall be lasting. We trust to Pope Benedict to arrange this peace.’

Peace, from now onwards, is more and more his cry. In the *Rosary Magazine* for September, 1915, he published an article in which a contributor examined the attitude of Benedict XV to the war, justifying it against the clamour for his intervention on the side of England and her allies raised by ‘the press as a whole, ranging from *The Nation* to the *Daily Mail*. The next month he pro-

tests against the stories of German atrocities then in circulation:

'We should not be among those who are for ever repeating the rumours of evil, or endeavour to ease our own nerves by re-telling stories of horror that may disquiet the nerves of others. Silence becomes us better than such wicked speech.'

He ends the year:

'The peace of Christ is a peace deeper than the circumstances of life. It is a peace born of the spirit, calming, quieting, stilling all agitation of heart. Those who stay and those who go require all the composure of soul they can muster. Perhaps more those who remain, for from the trenches one hears nothing of agitation The end of the year brings its memory of sorrow; but we should rather feel stirred by the fineness of their death and try to copy it as best we may in life.'

JOHN-BAPTIST REEVES, O.P.

* * * * *

We sincerely regret that the present unhappy conditions compel us to offer, for the time being, to our readers a materially reduced BLACKFRIARS. We are confident that they will share our hope that the growing difficulties (not least of all financial) will not necessitate the suspension of its publication. It may even happily occur that their interest will move some amongst them to strengthen that hope by contributing towards its subsidisation.

Editor.