

THE LIFE OF FR BEDE JARRETT ¹

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THIS life of Fr Bede Jarrett by two of his own Dominican brethren fulfils a long-felt hope. Ever since his death in 1934, his many friends have looked forward to a record of his life and work—especially during his long Provincialate of sixteen years—and a pen-picture of his lovable character and his very real holiness.

Only his own Brethren could write with full authority and understanding about his life as a Dominican, as a simple religious, as Prior and as Provincial. But among the large number of friends in other religious orders and in the world as well, many will no doubt be able to complete the picture, from a slightly different angle, in one way or another.

My own friendship with Cyril Jarrett began in very early days—indirectly, if one can put it like that, through his father and mother who were great friends of my own father and mother. I have very pleasant memories, even as a small boy, of visits made by Colonel Jarrett to our old home, Ballechin, in Perthshire—not so many of Mrs Jarrett, who, I think, found the very long (and in those days not very comfortable) journey up to Scotland rather too much for her. Curiously enough, I never met Cyril or any of his brothers until he and I met at Stonyhurst in 1893.

Cyril was ahead of me at the College by two years; how well I remember our first meeting after I had come up, a shy 'new boy' from Hodder, the preparatory school under the fatherly—even 'motherly'—care of Fr Cassidy, the best-known and remembered of all its heads. Cyril came up to me in the playground, all smiles and friendliness, and said: 'I say, I think we "know" each other!' Neither of us—again, curiously enough—had been told that we were to meet at school, and both had wondered vaguely if the Jarrett or Steuart at the College and at Hodder were more than just names.

¹ *Bede Jarrett of the Order of Preachers*. By Kenneth Wykeham-George, O.P., and Gervase Mathew, O.P. With a Foreword by Very Rev. Fr Hilary J. Carpenter, O.P., Prior Provincial of the English Dominicans. (Blackfriars Publications; 12s. 6d.)

But that meeting started a real and deep friendship between us which, although we did not afterwards meet very often or for long at a time, was always something more than mere acquaintanceship. At Stonyhurst, Cyril and I usually spent a good deal of our recreations talking together about our respective vocations—he as a Dominican, I as a Benedictine. In fact, a mutual ‘chum’ (I think it was Bertram Kirby—now, I am glad to see from the magazine, President of the Stonyhurst Association) declared that it was quite impossible to remember ‘which was going to be which. ‘I shall call you both “Dominictine”,’ he said.

Cyril and I entered our novitiate fairly close together—he went to Woodchester in 1898 and I to Fort Augustus the following year. During the whole of our novitiate periods we kept up a regular correspondence, discussing our experiences, comparing notes and so on. How I wish, now, that I had kept his letters! I remember at least, that they were often a great help to me—although ‘Brother Bede’ as he had now become, had not in any way ‘set out’ to help me. But often his evident contentment and his thoroughness in his vocation cheered me up and encouraged me in my own. We kept on our correspondence right up, I think, to his ordination in 1904. I myself was not ordained till 1907. We certainly still wrote regularly while Fr Bede was at Hawkesyard. After our ordination, letters became less frequent; but that fact and the fact that there were ‘wide spaces’ between our occasional meetings, in no way lessened our friendship. Fr Bede had the great gift of always making one feel that one was ‘wanted’, that there was complete sympathy and understanding; it was never necessary to begin all over again. All his friends, I think, would agree as to this. As the authors say, ‘Fr Bede had been making close personal friendship ever since he had been at Stonyhurst. Through the years their numbers increased steadily, for none of them would ever seem to have been lost.’ (p. 114.)

To have read this life by Fr Kenneth and Fr Gervase is really as though one could see him again and hear him speak—see him as clearly as in the typical picture of him on page 136, which also looks out, with just the beginning of his friendly smile, on the cover.