

the *original* scapular, ordered by St Benedict as a working dress, ceased to exist. What it was really like is disputed: St Benedict does not describe it in his Rule, but speaks of it as of something well-known—although the word is not found anywhere else before the Saint's own time. Some think that the scapular was a small edition of the cowl—a hood and cape covering the shoulders (hence the name—from *scapulae*, 'the shoulders'). If this was the case, the scapular would simply be the original small cowl. Others think the scapular may have been a special form of belt worn by Eastern monks for manual work, and having straps or bands passing over the shoulders—hence, again, the name 'scapular'.

This lapse in historical research is, however, only a small blemish and does not interfere with the real value of the book.

And, we must not omit to give a word of sincere praise to the really beautiful photographs (the work, it seems, of a lay-brother of the Grande Chartreuse) with which the book is adorned: they are real 'pictures' and are a veritable revelation of the beauty and solitude of this centre of Carthusian life.



## FRIARS IN BLACK

BY

GERARD MEATH, O.P.

**T**HE religion of thy father Dominic is a delightful garden, broad, joyous and fragrant.' Admirers of the spirit and children of Saint Dominic would appreciate our Lord's word 'broad' when he spoke to Saint Catherine, for it is said that no two Dominicans are alike. Whatever that means, something good or something dangerous, it is but one half of a story that is on the surface paradoxical. That St Dominic's spirit and sympathies were indeed broad can never be in doubt if we look at the characters of his first companions, a set of men at once entirely diverse and bending all their diverse talents to one purpose. For seven hundred years that spirit has grown stronger by the very diversity of its followers. Perhaps there has grown with it also a romantic aura that again is half good and half dangerous. In the

first flush of youth a young man may set out to follow St Dominic for motives that on the surface are indeed romantic. He may have visions of multitudes swayed by his eloquence, of an England converted by his example; he may even find the black and white wool itself irresistible. And later in life, as he plods diligently round his parish in a dusty black suit, he will remember these things not with regret but with gratitude; for we all, in a measure, drift into a way of life from motives half understood, half idealistic, and then some years later perhaps we understand that behind them all is something far more cogent that can only be described as the will of God. The watchdog of the Lord realises that he himself has been pursued all along by the Hound of Heaven.

Despite the changes in life the modern friar has much in common with the medieval, for his work is substantially the same. And yet perhaps in the twentieth century glamour has less chance to dominate; the modern friar, whatever other physical grace he may be blessed with, is rarely seen striking a romantic medieval attitude in his monastic habit. Much of his work is done quietly in a drab black suit, he travels by a humdrum bus or tube, and carries his belongings in a satchel on his back. Perhaps we meet him leaning on a lamp waiting for a bus, and it is only when we have passed by that we realise there was the famous Father So-and-so who writes those books and talks on the radio. Like much else, the true glory must be within, and in these days of utility and austerity we expect to look inside for the reality.

Here again perhaps St Catherine may give us a clue. It was she who, when the conditions of life appeared to be rising up to smother her spirit, declared that she would build in her heart a cell in which the life of God would forever spring. We know what that supernatural vitality achieved for her, and the modern friar, like his ancient counterpart, no less lives by that inner life. When Dominic and Francis allowed their 'new invention' to burst upon the world they were not without opponents and critics. What is this new half-breed, it was asked, neither monk nor priest nor teacher? A monk whose cloister is the world? A monstrous notion. But it was after all a simple case of Mahomet and the mountain. No one in his senses would pretend that it is an easy matter to carry a mountain anywhere. And yet that was Dominic's ideal, to carry the mountain of religion into a pagan countryside. If the valleys were to be exalted he must carry in his soul the

wherewithal. Not only must he have the tools of his trade with which to make straight the ways of the Lord; preaching and teaching eloquence and a strong constitution must all be there; they would do much of the straightening. But in addition there must be an inexhaustible source of love. It is easy to idealise the picture of St Dominic sitting up all night talking the innkeeper into true faith, but anyone who has sat up the night with pricking eyeballs and weary limbs will realise that even the most generous, intelligent and comely conversationalist looks a bore and even a boor at three o'clock in the morning when the coldest point before dawn strikes chill even in our supernatural charity. No, the medieval friar's life was not warmed from within by a kind of troubadour romance. If we want to see where St Dominic learnt the patience and deep love that he showed the innkeeper, we must go and look at a slab of stone that lies in the Dominican Church of Santa Sabina in Rome. If the spiritual vitality of the Order of Preachers can have a physical centre, it must be there, for it was on this slab scarcely six feet long and three feet wide that St Dominic would kneel nightly and pray for his brothers whom he had just put to bed. He knew by practice as well as by preaching that charity begins at home, and a man who has no home gives charity a bad start. Because it is so much taken for granted and because it is a daily humdrum necessity, the love of those we live with is at once the hardest and the most powerful love. St Dominic knew this well enough and taught his young men that the charity of their missions and travel must grow out of the charity of the cloister. If a Dominican is to be able to spend hours sitting up with the sick soul of an innkeeper or a bus-conductor or coal-miner, he must first learn his patience by sitting up with the sick body of one of his own dying brothers in Haverstock Hill or Hawkesyard. The heart that opens to the old man's delirious complaints will be the heart that opens to the young communist's world-weariness. It has often been noted that Dominicans want to die in their priories. It is not the glamour of the sung *Salve* round the bed nor even the easy familiarity of the white and black. It is something more. No amount of hospital efficiency can substitute for the true centre where the heart is at rest. The circle must be completed and the apostle must die in the cradle where he was brought to his second birth and from which he went out on his journey. For Dominican life is a going out and a coming in.

*Contemplata aliis tradere* means just that. Not only does he give the world the truth and love he has learnt in his priory, but he brings back to his brethren the sound sense and practical charity (which is only another sort of truth and love) which he has learnt in the slums and lecture halls and highways and byways. His life is a movement between cloister and street which lives by the Communion of Saints.

But there must be a cradle. Of that St Dominic was certain and his successors have been equally certain. Monastic observance is the cold legal word for it; but no word will compass the true reality of what is a full life. Yet if the mind and the will are to be trained none the less the mountain must be carried to the prophet. That is to say the friar must have abundance of spiritual life to carry around with him and subsist on for days and even months on end before returning to his cloister for 'refuelling'. More than that; he must have enough and to spare, for he is to distribute the gifts of the spirit to those he meets on the way. His knowledge and his eloquence will be strained, and so will his love. The children of God often appear in disguise, and just as it was difficult to recognise a once-loved Dominican in the cancer-ravaged old man in the iron bed, so it is difficult to recognise a child of God in the pleasure-loving young man who can think only of the objections to being good. There he needs once again not only experience and training but the 'cell of the heart'. He cannot run back to his priory to pray and take counsel. A thousand times a week, on bus or tube, in the convent parlour or country lane, he will have to turn 'inwards', as they say, to the Master whom he has learnt from St Catherine to carry about with him and seek counsel on the spot. It is not perhaps for nothing that the Dominican theologians have pondered for long on the nature of sufficient grace. The dropped railway ticket, the accidental encounter on the bus, the lost road and asking for direction have all borne the fingerprints of God, and perhaps all he has had time for has been a hurried 'God-help-me' before plunging into an account of the Papal claims to the socialist he met on the train.

If there is one thing that marks the friar it is this Janus-headed quality; somehow he has to contrive to face both time and eternity at once, and his head or at least his heart must be among the stars while his feet are very firmly planted on an earth that is only too muddy. 'A swinging wicket pitched between the unseen

and the seen'—Francis Thompson's words have been applied to St Dominic, and that balance was achieved through a zeal which was fired by love. Sometimes the zeal of the Preachers has been interpreted as a purely intellectual affair easily degenerating into a passion for reform, but we find a more balanced and unbiassed account from Philip Wicksteed, the English translator of Dante: 'Dominic did *not* found the Inquisition; he did not take any considerable part in the persecution of the Albigenses . . . and he did not utter the well-known rebuke of the pomp and luxury of the Papal legates, but listened to it as his superior Didacus delivered it. Very little of his biography, as usually told, is left after this; but that little shows him as a man of boundless love and compassion. When a student, he sold his books in a season of famine to give to the poor; he once offered to sell himself to redeem a captive; and his 'frequent and special prayer' to God was for the gift of true charity. It is good to remember the 'boundless love and compassion' and the selling of the books when we hear of the 'high cold intellectual' ideal of Dominican teaching. Dedication to the truth there must be, but the teachers Thomas and Albert never ceased to insist that truth, unless it be the truth that is God himself, is an abstraction that can never be a driving force in life—except in so far as it is the truth that makes men free. A Dominican is said to be dedicated to truth. That is not to say that he is destined simply to be a student and a teacher; that certainly is one of the first things. But alone it does not make a Dominican. His mind and his will will be complementary, as it were, his love for God and his fellow creatures will flow into and direct his study whether he reads the *Summa*, Cajetan, Frank Sheed, or the penny Catechism. It will be reading with a purpose. He is looking for the truth to make men (and this includes himself) free from sin. And on the other hand, 'apostolic' work, that is to say, preaching and teaching in the widest sense, will be directed by the intellectual search for truth. It is sometimes said that Dominicans are cold intellectual creatures (the same thing is said of the Jesuits). If that were so it would be wrong. The reason must direct coolly, it is true, but the driving force is the will: love of God and man. No Dominican loves truth for truth's sake; that is a desiccated academic thing. He loves truth for God and the people it will do good to. He soon discovers that unless he cares for people he will not take the trouble to find out the truth about their prayer problems,

faith difficulties, marriage tangles. And of course unless he cares for God he will not continue to care for people, though as Mother Janet Erskine Stuart wisely observed, for most of us the love of God expresses itself all our lives as love of his creatures. But it is important to appreciate just what this study of truth means. Someone once said that a Dominican house is not an intellectual centre for religious people but a religious centre for intelligent people. Work is not confined to the libraries and lecture halls. The search for truth goes on in daily parochial visiting, answering letters, preaching sermons and a thousand things. The truth does not *have* to be difficult to find and elusive. It is most often on the surface if only we could see. A Dominican is not to be pictured as a massive-headed but a clear-headed man, and his head will be kept clear by single-mindedness. 'If thine eye be lightsome. . . .' The light is the light of clear purpose, and clear purpose is expressed in the Dominican's first dedication which comes through his vow of chastity.

The vow of chastity is no mere self-denial, it is the dedication of his love, and he very soon realises that this is a very practical thing, not in the sense that it would be unpractical to have a wife and family trailing behind him around the country, but in the much more positive sense that unless he does in fact choose to dedicate his love—and this means all the energies of his mind and will—to God and his creatures, his life will mean nothing. Someone once said that Dominicans always affirm rather than deny; they try, if you wish, to agree with you, not out of any spirit of compromise or conciliation, but in an effort to find the hard core of truth that there must be in what you believe. In a more fundamental way a Dominican affirms his vows. He does indeed 'give up' his possessions and his will and his family ties, but he is very conscious that this is only a denial for the purposes of a greater affirmation. Unless his vows mean that he is to become, like St Paul, 'as having nothing yet possessing all things', they have failed in their purpose. It was a Dominican nun who once observed the divine irony of turning from the life of a mother of a family only to find herself the headmistress of a kindergarten with more heads to wash per night than she dared to think of during the day. And the number of heads to wash is the number of souls to be saved.

Certainly the 'queer half-breeds' that Dominic and Francis

brought into the world have been proved 'the weather-bitten conduits of many Kings' reigns', carrying the waters of grace from heaven to earth. It is too much to ask them to sing their own praises (in Dante the panegyric on Francis is pronounced by a Dominican and that on Dominic by a Franciscan, whereas the denunciations of unworthy Dominicans and Franciscans is in each case pronounced by one of themselves), but they can at least set up their ideals so as to beat their own breasts and call the world to praise not themselves but those men who first raised the standards. And always let it be remembered there will be some secret treasure too precious to be brought out of hiding. *Sacramentum regis abscondere bonum est*. Yet even that does not explain it; it is not simply a precious family secret that we won't share; it is something that is so deep we can't uncover it to share. St Dominic's flagstone in Santa Sabina is at once a sign and a guarantee of a father's love that stretches over seven centuries and rests on the dusty little black suits that move around the slums of Hampstead and Walker and Whit Lane. Almost his last words were: 'I am going where I can serve you better'. As they stood round his deathbed the brethren had been grieved, but now he was gone no one could feel any heaviness. Already his service had begun and he stood where he has stood ever since—by the throne of the Great Judge as advocate for his little flock of poor ones.



## MOTHER THERESE COUDERC

BY

A MEMBER OF HER CONGREGATION

**T**HE year 1885 saw the passing of one of the great spiritual figures of that century: Mother Thérèse Couderc, Co-foundress of the Cenacle. Her contemporaries witness that at her death 'there passed away a glory from the earth'—and Holy Church, agreeing with their verdict, will shortly proclaim her Blessed—a model of holiness for the whole world. How did she arrive at that shining sanctity which became so transparently evident as her long life drew to a close? It was simply by being a true Christian—through a complete surrender of herself into the hands of God, allowing him to do with her exactly as he pleased