

THE GREY FRIARS OF CANTERBURY.

A Paper read on 31st July 1918.

BY A. G. LITTLE, M.A., F.R.HIST.S.

THE remains of Franciscan friaries in England are generally so scanty¹ that one would need the knowledge and insight of a Sir William Hope to make anything of them. The friary did not have, in the life of the friars, anything like the importance which the monastery had in the life of monks. When someone threatened to report one of the early Provincial Ministers of the English Franciscans to the Minister General because there was no wall round the London friary and anyone could go in or out of it who liked, the Provincial retorted: "And I shall tell the Minister General that I did not become a Franciscan to build walls."

St. Francis of Assisi was essentially an open-air Saint. The sun and the wind were his brothers, the flowers and the birds his sisters. If he had been in the habit of condemning people he would, like Dante, have provided a circle in Hell for those who "were sullen in the sweet air which is gladdened by the sun." But he was not given to condemning people. His sympathy with human life was as wide as his sympathy with nature. "A saint among saints," says his biographer, Thomas of Celano, "among sinners he was as one of themselves." One recalls his well-known

¹ Mr. S. Vincett, the present tenant of the Grey Friars of Canterbury, who took the party round the grounds after this paper was read, shewed that there were still considerable remains of the Friary. He also proved that it was possible to establish the position, size and date of the Church and some other buildings from existing foundations and fragments of pillars. A full investigation of the site, which it is hoped may soon be undertaken, should furnish results of more than local interest. Meanwhile the loving and intelligent care with which Mr. Vincett has guarded the treasures under his control entitles him to the gratitude both of Kent archæologists and of all who are interested in Franciscan history.

words on courtesy: "Courtesy is an attribute of God Himself, Who makes His sun to shine and His rain to fall equally upon the just and upon the unjust; and courtesy is the sister of charity and quenches hate and keeps love alive." Humility and sympathy were the foundations of that courtesy which he naturally extended to all men equally, though it must be admitted that he felt more at ease when picnicing with robbers than when dining with a cardinal. Certain Canterbury Franciscans who received the royal pardon in 1338 for rescuing two felons who were being carried to execution would probably have received the Saint's pardon also.

A man like St. Francis, to whom—

"Love was an unerring light
And joy its own security;"

a man who thought that the utmost penance to be inflicted on an offending brother should be the simple injunction, "Go and sin no more," was able to kindle a divine fire in the hearts of his followers which has never gone out, but was not fitted to be the organiser of an Order. The organisation of the Franciscan Order was the work of other hands than his, and some even of the early steps in its development were fiercely resisted by the Founder, or only accepted with deep distrust.

But if the Order did not proceed along the lines which Francis would have wished, the changes were not all to its disadvantage. This is notably the case in the growth of learning. The Franciscan Order very soon became one of the great Student Orders, partly owing to the number of learned men who entered its ranks, partly through conscious imitation of and rivalry with the Dominican Order, and partly owing to the pressing demands of the time.

Francis distrusted learning because he held it inconsistent with holy poverty. It would involve the possession of books and larger and settled houses, and would lead to the formation of a sort of learned aristocracy among the friars; it would tend to place words higher than deeds, preaching higher than example. To a friar who wanted a psalter he

said: "After you have got a psalter you will want a breviary, and then you will sit in a chair like a bishop and say to your brother, 'Fetch me my breviary.'" In course of time all these results did follow, but for about a hundred years it was the glory of the English Franciscan Province to shew that learning and poverty were not irreconcilable.

The Franciscan Province of England has a great record as a home of thought and learning. With one exception all the greatest and most original leaders of thought among the Franciscans belonged to the English Province—Roger Bacon, the father of scientific method; Duns Scotus, the leader of the realists, who held that ideas or generalizations are the true realities; William of Occam, the leader of the nominalists, who held that individual things are the ultimate realities. The divergent views and interests of these men implies the existence of great intellectual activity and of real liberty of thought in the Franciscan schools, in spite of occasional efforts of the authorities to suppress it. Fortunately no one in the Franciscan Order acquired the oppressive intellectual predominance which St. Thomas Aquinas obtained in the Dominican Order.

Besides the few original thinkers, the Province produced a large number of men of intellectual eminence and wide learning, such as Friar John Peckham (or, as he should be called, Patcham), Archbishop of Canterbury, mathematician, poet, theologian, as well as ecclesiastical politician, who, even as archbishop, is said to have lived with the simplicity which became a friar.

Nearly every Franciscan house had an ordinary school of theology for the training of preachers, and some houses possessed special schools for the study of arts (or logic), natural and moral philosophy, and more advanced theology.

The house at Canterbury had a theological lecturer as early as 1237; whether it ever developed into a special school is unknown. The number of MSS. still preserved belonging to the house (biblical, theological, historical, natural science) shews that it possessed a varied library, and in a city where clergy congregated there was an opening

for such a school. For there is evidence that secular clergy were encouraged to attend the friars' schools, and friars were not infrequently appointed as lecturers in the Chancellor's cathedral schools. The most interesting educational activity connected with the Franciscans in Canterbury is outside the Franciscan house. The monks of the thirteenth century were generally remarkably ignorant of theology, and singularly untouched by the great scholastic revival of the time. Occasionally they were stung by the example of the friars to some intellectual activity. This happened at Canterbury. In 1275 "the Convent of Christchurch of their own free will appointed a friar minor, William of Everal, to lecture on theology . . . This is unprecedented," adds the monastic chronicler, "and what the result of this lecture and school will be, time will shew, since innovations produce quarrels." However, the arrangement lasted forty years, a succession of Franciscan lecturers to the monks being appointed until some of the monks were declared fitted to undertake the office, and the last Franciscan lecturer was dismissed in 1314 with a flaming testimonial. The only disputes we hear about were due to the monks' unwillingness to supply a suitable study and books for their teacher.

The Grey Friars of Canterbury, like most Franciscan houses in England, adhered in the main throughout the three hundred years of their existence to their vow of poverty. Two pieces of evidence, at the beginning and at the end of this period, may be cited.

The first is the well-known passage from Eccleston, describing the arrival of the friars. After landing at Dover the nine friars who formed the English mission proceeded to Canterbury, where they stayed two nights in the priory of Christchurch. Four at once started for London, and the remaining five moved to the hospital of Poor Priests (in Worthgate Ward) until they found a lodging. Soon afterwards they were granted a small room in the Grammar School, where they remained shut up in the day-time. At night, after the scholars had gone home, they went into the schoolroom and made a fire there and sat by it, and some-

times put on the fire a pot containing dregs of beer, and, dipping a cup in the mixture, handed it round, each one as he drank giving an edifying toast or proverb. "As one who took part in this sincere simplicity and holy poverty said, the drink was sometimes so thick that they filled it up with water, and so they drank with gladness . . ." As the numbers increased "the Master of the Hospital of Poor Priests gave them a site and built them a chapel, and, as they would not have any property of their own, it was made the property of the community of the city and lent to the friars at the will of the citizens."¹ This was in 1224, and a little later. At the end of the period, in 1534, Lord Lisle, Governor of Calais, authorized a public subscription for "the Grey Friars of Canterbury who have no lands or rents."

Lord Lisle's statement that the Grey Friars of Canterbury had no lands is true in the sense that they did not own landed estates like a Benedictine monastery, but it requires some modification. The Dissolution documents shew that the Grey Friars held, besides the site of their house, 2 messuages, 2 orchards, 2 gardens, 3 acres of arable, 10 acres of meadow, and 4 acres of pasture in the parishes of St. Peter, St. Mildred and St. Margaret—probably some 18 or 20 acres in all—most but not all of it forming a continuous block. This formed (with some later additions) their second and permanent site in the island called Binnewiht, which was bought for them by John Dygg, alderman and afterwards bailiff of Canterbury, in 1268, perhaps in his official capacity as representing the city. The exact boundaries of the site have not been determined. It did not, I think, include the northern half of the island beyond the high road, nor did it extend to the west gate. (The licence for alienation in mortmain of the plot of land on which the Church of Holy Cross was built in 1380 does not mention the Grey Friars.) Nor did it reach the western branch of the Stour: the western boundary was a road, perhaps Griffin Lane. The

¹ This first site is unknown: the public records throw no light on it. Henry III., who lavished gifts on the Black Friars of Canterbury, gave only a few loads of firewood to the Grey Friars.

friars, in 1309, obtained a roadway to the Stour and permission to build a bridge over the river for the convenience of people coming to their church, on condition that boats could freely pass beneath it; this, perhaps, refers to the eastern or city branch of the river.

Their new church was consecrated in 1325. Apart from a number of burials and a few references to chapels, nothing more is known about it.

Nearly all the friaries throughout England rebuilt or enlarged their churches and houses between 1270 and 1320. This is evidence of their popularity, but it entailed a heavy burden on societies which depended on voluntary contributions. There is no doubt the friars overbuilt themselves, and the task of maintaining themselves and their houses occupied an undue proportion of their energies and crippled their spiritual, intellectual and social activities. Before the period of great intellectual activity was over, opportunities were offered them for carrying out in a more or less systematic manner what we should call social reforms. It may seem an anachronism to talk of social reform in the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries, but it is not so really: thus, a Society was formed in England in the thirteenth century to help people who fell into the hands of moneylenders; Roger Bacon declared that the care of the sick and aged poor should be borne by the State; in Venice a Franciscan friar established a Foundling hospital. One instance of an opportunity of this kind may be mentioned because it is connected with the Grey Friars of Canterbury. In 1291 Gregory of Rokesley, Mayor of London, bequeathed the residue of his property in the dioceses of London, Rochester and Canterbury to the poor, with instructions that the Warden of the Grey Friars of London and the Warden of the Grey Friars of Canterbury were to be consulted about the disposal of it. The English Grey Friars generally did not rise to this opportunity. The periods of spiritual fervour and intellectual leadership were not followed by a period of social reconstruction.

The Franciscan Order has, however, again and again shewn its vitality by reform movements within its own body.

One of the early movements—that of the Observant Friars—touched the Canterbury friary, which in 1498 was changed into a house of Observant Friars. Some present may have come into contact with the yearly mission of the Capuchin Friars to the hop-pickers in Kent. And St. Francis still performs miracles in circles not confined to any one religious community, and still inspires the weak with courage and the strong with gentleness.

A NOTE ON THE GREY FRIARS, CANTERBURY,
circa 1533—1539.

BY MISS CHURCHILL, F.R.Hist.S.

As the history and the site of the Grey Friars at Canterbury are at the moment claiming the attention of Members of the Kent Archæological Society, the following note may be of some interest. It is the outcome of research, designed to verify Hasted's¹ statement that the Grey Friars at Canterbury were dissolved in 1534, that Hugh Rich was the last warden, and that the lands were granted 31 Henry VIII. (1539) to Thomas Spilman.

The Calendars of the Letters and Papers of Henry VIII. (Ed. Gairdner)² are the chief source from which the note has been derived; they help to fill in the gap between 1534 and 1539, and prove that the Grey Friars did not finally disappear from Canterbury till the end of 1538, and that there were other wardens holding office after April 1534 (the date of Hugh Rich's execution).

The House at Canterbury belonged to the Observant Congregation, whose houses were among the first to be suppressed on account of the refusal of members to take the Oath of Supremacy. The friars throughout stubbornly opposed the King's union with Anne Boleyn. On June 30, 1533, John Coke, Clerk to the Merchant Adventurers at Antwerp,

¹ *History of the City of Canterbury*, 1801, p. 169; and *History of Kent*, 1778, vol. iv., p. 447.

² Referred to below as L., etc., vol., No.

wrote to Crumwell that Friar Petowe and other Friars of Greenwich, Richmond and Canterbury were at Antwerp writing books against the King's marriage with Anne.¹ Many of the friars had dealings with Elizabeth Barton, the nun of Kent, and two of the Observants, "Hugh Ryche, fryer Observaunt and late warden of the fryers Observaunt of Canterbury," together with Father Risby are included in the Act of Attainder² against Elizabeth Barton and suffered at Tyburn April 20, 1534.³ Father Risby is also connected with Canterbury, and it is not easy to determine, from the evidence so far examined, if he preceded or succeeded Rich in the office of warden, or if the latter ever exercised that office at Canterbury. For while in a footnote to L., etc., vi., 1466, date about November 1533, there is this statement, "Rich, late warden of Observants, Canterbury, and Richard Risby, who seems to have succeeded to Rich's office of warden, see No. 1470" (quoted below), such a sequence is nowhere definitely stated in the actual papers. The following are the entries bearing on the point: In a memorandum concerning the various people implicated with the nun of Kent,⁴ also about November 1533, Hugh Rich is referred to first as Friar Observant, and then (assuming his identity) as Father Ryche of Richmond, while Friar Risby is said to be an Observant of Canterbury. Again, Thomas, Prior of Christ Church, Canterbury, in a letter to Crumwell presumably about the end of November 1533, writes: "Father Risby, now Warden of the Observant Friars of Canterbury, was the cause of my being acquainted with her (*i.e.*, Elizabeth Barton)."⁵ Further, in January 1533-4, in a note on the Nun of Kent, we read: "Many persons were ready to preach her revelations . . . Hugh Riche, late Warden of the Observants at Richmond, and Richard Risbye, late Warden of Canterbury."⁶ Sir Thomas

¹ L., etc., vi., 726.

² Statutes of the Realm, 25 Henry VIII., C. 12. The Bill of Attainder was brought into the House of Lords on February 21, 1534, and passed on March 12. (*Political History of England*, Ed. W. Hunt and R. L. Poole, vol. v., p. 334.)

³ L., etc., vii., 522.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vi., 1468.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1470.

⁶ *Ibid.*, vii., 72.

More wrote to Crumwell, March 1534: "Now as I was about to tell you about Christmas was twelvemonth (Father) Resbye, Friar Observant, then of Canterbury, lodged at my house;" and further on in the same letter, "about Shrove-tide Father Riche, Friar Observant of Richmond, came a little before supper."¹ Then in January 1533-4 John Laurence, also a friar, wrote to Crumwell: "If you please I shall return to my cloister, I beg I may be put in the room of one of the two Fathers now in hold, not from any wish of promotion but for the king's honor and yours and the safeguard of my person."² A footnote to this passage gives Friars Ryche and Risby as the two Fathers. Now this, taken together with the previous extracts, suggests a vacancy in the wardenships about January 1533-4, and it is known that the wardens held office for a short time only. Was it perhaps at this date that Rich was appointed to Canterbury? It would at any rate account for him and not Risby being connected with that place in the Act of Attainder. Or are we to conclude that the Act of Attainder is incorrect?

In April 1534 a commission was issued to George Browne, Prior of the Augustinian Hermits, whom the King appointed Provincial of the Order in England, and to John Hilsey, Provincial of the Friars Preachers, to visit the houses of all friars to enquire concerning their life and morals, and to instruct them how to conduct themselves.³ It was also proposed that they should be assembled in their chapter-houses and examined separately concerning their faith and obedience to Henry VIII., and bound by an oath of allegiance to him, Queen Anne and her present and future issue.⁴ The friars remained obdurate, and on August 11 Chapuys wrote to Charles V.: "Of the seven houses of Observants five have been already emptied of Friars, because they have refused to swear to the Statutes made against the Pope. Those in the two others expect also to be expelled."⁵ Again on August 29: "All the Observants have been driven out of

¹ L., etc., vii., 287.

² *Ibid.*, 139.

³ *Ibid.*, 587 (18).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 590.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1057.

their monasteries for refusing the oath against the Holy See."¹

It would seem from the following extract that the friars at Canterbury endeavoured to come to terms with the King, for on June 1, 1534,² Father Bernardine Covert, described as Warden of Canterbury, wrote to Lady Lisle at Calais that he had made a quiet end with my Lord of Canterbury and had very good words from him; that his accuser was dead. And again on June 13,³ in answer to her enquiries how he had fared with the King and my Lord of Canterbury, trusted that he had made an end quietly and to the honour of God. In the same year Lord Lisle issued a licence to John Amney, priest (and one other), to collect money within the King's East Pale for the Grey Friars, Canterbury, who have no lands nor rents.⁴

After Chapuy's statement in August 1534, we should expect to find no further references to the Grey Friars at Canterbury. Yet this is not the case, for in March 1535 Arthur, Grey Friar of Canterbury, preached "seditiously" in the Church of Herne,⁵ and on November 8, 1535, Freer John Arthur, in a letter to . . . Prow, writes that "he was appointed Warden of the Grey Friars, Canterbury, by the King against the heart of the Provincial; kept observance somewhat strict because they rebelled against the King and held so stiffly to the Bishop of Rome, for which he daily reproved them." But in the end he lost favour and fled overseas to Dieppe, whence he wrote, complaining that his mortal enemy had been made warden in his stead.⁶ What is the explanation? Did Father Covert come to terms with the King, and did the Grey Friars escape suppression in 1534, so that Chapuy's statement on August 11 that of the seven houses of Observants five have been suppressed is correct, but not that on August 29? Or was the Canterbury house suppressed in 1534, but its inmates accorded the King's protection?⁷ Then, as was the case at Greenwich,⁸ did the

¹ L., etc., vii., 1095.

² *Ibid.*, 765.

³ *Ibid.*, 837.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1620.

⁵ *Ibid.*, viii., 480.

⁶ *Ibid.*, ix., 789.

⁷ The names of Barnardine Covert and John Laurence are given as exempt in a list of Friars at the beginning of Miscellaneous Book 153, Treasury of Receipt, printed in L., etc., vii., 1607, under date 1534. This list, however, does not state to which house they belonged.

⁸ L., etc., xii., part i., 795 (44).

King at a later date establish a house of Conventuals there with Freer John Arthur as Warden?

Between 1535 and the end of 1538 there seems to be no information about the Canterbury house. The dissolution of the smaller monasteries began in 1535, and during the next two years the larger houses were gradually extinguished by process of surrender. The turn of the friaries came in 1538.

In Cranmer's Register at Lambeth Palace Library, folios 16A, 68B and 69A, are two copies of Henry VIII.'s commission to Richard, Bishop of Dover, to visit the friaries throughout England and to receive their seals, dated May 5, 1538.¹ The itinerary pursued by the Bishop can be traced in Gairdner's Introduction to vol. xiii., part 2, of the Calendar of Letters and Papers; it was December before he came to Kent. On October 5 Cranmer wrote to Crumwell: "I perceive you have already suppressed certain Friars' houses, and I trust your proceedings will extend to Canterbury that the irreligious religion there may be extincted. As the Grey Friars, Canterbury, is very commodious for my servant Thomas Cobham, brother to Lord Cobham, I beg you will help him to the said house."²

Then the Bishop of Dover wrote to Crumwell in December (possibly on the 15th), that on the 13th he came to Canterbury and found three houses "more in debt than all they have can pay . . . Black and Grey Friars are able with their implements to pay their debts and the Bishop's costs and a little more."³ There is apparently no further entry giving the exact date of their suppression, but it must have been about that time, as the next entries refer to the disposal of the property and its acquisition by Thomas Spilman.

On March 3, 1539, Sir Christopher Hales wrote to Crumwell: "My fellow Spylman, who is here, one of the receivers of the Augmentations, has before this enterprised to meddle

¹ The commission is printed in Wilkins' *Concilia*, iii., p. 835, from folio 16A, and indexed by Ducarel in his *Index to the Archiepiscopal Registers* under "Visitaciones," while the entry on folio 68B is given under "Mendicantes," possibly due to the different wording of the marginalia.

² L., etc., xiii., part 2, 537.

³ *Ibid.*, 1058.

with the house lately belonging to Grey Friars of Canterbury, and, as he says, by your Lordship's direction. He now tells me that Bathherst, whom I have heard the King wishes to dwell in Canterbury for the erection of cloth making, has lately informed him that the King intends him to have the said house, and he has asked him for the keys of it, which Spylman has refused. If Bathherst or another of the best clothiers in Kent were disposed to set up cloth making in Canterbury, the house of Black Friars would be sufficient for the purpose, but I hear he insists on having the Grey Friars."¹

The grant to Spilman by the Crown is among the enrolment of leases in the Augmentation Office under date February 10, 1539. The description of the property as there given will doubtless be of interest to readers of this note. It is as follows: "Scitum domus nuper fratrum minorum vulgariter nuncupatorum les Grey freres in civitate Cantuarie modo dissolut' ac omnia messuagia domos edificia ortos pomeria gardina stagna vinaria terram et solum infra scitum muros septum ambitum et precinctum eiusdem domus nuper fratrum existentes."² In the grant by Letters Patent³ dated at Tyrling, July 17, 31 Henry VIII., 1539, and quoted in the account for the farm of the site of the Grey Friars rendered by Spilman, these items are given as well: "Totam ecclesiam, campanile et cimiterium."⁴ There is again a description of the lands, but giving no further details, in a deed enrolled on the Close Roll, 35 Henry VIII., by which Thomas Spylman granted the "hoole howse and scyte of Howse of late Fryers minours" (etc.) for £200 to Thomas Rolf, and undertook to levy a fine for the better assurance

¹ L., etc., xiv., part 1, 423. In this connection it is interesting to note that in 30-31 Henry VIII., Ministers' Accounts, in the Record Office, No. 1756, m. 72d, one John Bateherst renders an account as "firmarius" for the house of the Preaching Friars, "vulgariter nuncupatorum lez Blacke Fryers infra civitatem Cantuarie," and again in No. 1757, 32-33 Henry VIII.

² Record Office. Augmentation Office, Miscellaneous Books, No. 211, folio 40, calendared in L., etc., xiv., part 1, 1355, p. 609.

³ Record Office. Patent Roll, 31 Henry VIII., part 1, No. 686, m. 26.

⁴ Record Office. Ministers' Accounts, Henry VIII., 1756, for 30-31 Henry VIII., m. 72d.

of the property.¹ In the fine it is described thus: "De scitu domus nuper fratrum minorum cum pertinentiis infra civitatem Cantuarie ac de duobus messuagiis duobus pomariis duobus gardinis tribus acris terre decem acris prati et quatuor acris pasture cum pertinentiis in parochiis Omnium Sanctorum, Sancti Petri, Sancte Mildrede et Sancte Margarete in civitate predicta."² It would have been interesting if an inventory or more exact details of the buildings and appurtenances at the time of the dissolution could have been found. Presumably the land being granted out practically at once to one of the King's receivers, no detailed inventory was ever made.

Kent Archaeological Society is a registered charity number 223382

© Kent Archaeological Society

¹ Record Office. Close Roll, 35 Henry VIII., part 1, No. 433, m. 5.

² Record Office. Feet of Fines, Henry VIII., Bundle 53, File 383, No. 18. This is the same wording as Hasted, *op. cit.*, p. 448, with the exception that he gives 5 acres meadow. According to Hasted, Spilman alienated the land, 35 Henry VIII., to Erasmus Finch. Actually it appears from an inquisition post-mortem, William Lovelace, taken September 29, 20 Eliz. (1578), that Thomas Rolf granted it February 16, 1565-6, to Lovelace and others, and that it was assigned by them to Mary widow of Rolf for life in compensation for her dower, November 10, 9 Eliz. (1567), and that she subsequently married one Erasmus Finch (I.P.M., Court of Wards, 20/85).