

## NOTES

### *ON THE NAME BLACKFRIARS*

THE name Blackfriars is a survival of our Catholic past. To the average Londoner—that most provincial of Englishmen—it suggests a certain bridge over the Thames, or perhaps the station on the District Railway. For the man with little sense of history, who gathers his associations from things around him, historic names easily lose their original significance. Waterloo in London or Liverpool do not always smite the imagination with visions of Wellington and 1815. Carmelite Street harbours men whose ways are far removed from those of the friars of Carmel. The Coliseum is badly named if it is meant to suggest its namesake in Rome. And the Alhambra does not exactly speak to us of the glories of Spanish art.

How often does the word Blackfriars as currently used in London to-day bring to mind the Dominicans? Yet it is certain that the Dominicans, or to give them their correct title, Preaching Friars or Friar-Preachers, were generally known as Blackfriars in pre-Reformation days, though it is not easy to say at what date precisely the name first appears. The Dominican habit consists of a long tunic or gown of white wool over which is worn a long scapular and a hood or capuce of the same colour and material. The Rule enjoins that, outside his convent, the friar should wear the cappa, the name given to a long black cloak, together with a hood, also of black. Thus to the outsider the Friar-Preacher would appear robed in black. From this fact arose the name Blackfriar.

The earliest reference we have found to the use of the word is in a charter granted to the Friar-Preachers of Aberdeen, in 1342, by one Andrew Sleich, in which

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he refers to the convent as "Black freiris" place. The same Dominican house is called "Black freiris" in another charter ten years later (1352). (Aberdeen Friars, Cal. of Documents, ed. Anderson, 1909, pp. 15, 16.) In England we have not found any instance of the use of the word previous to the year 1466, when we find it employed in the will of Lady Cicily Torboke, who willed "that the blake frerys of Chester have vjs. viijd." (Palmer, "Blackfriars of Chester," in the *Reliquary*, Oct., 1882, p. 101.)

It is of interest to note that the other names applied to the Friar-Preachers, i.e. Jacobins (from the name of their great house of St. Jacques in Paris), Predicants, Order of St. Dominic, and Dominicans, all occur earlier in England than the name Blackfriar. Also of interest is the description given of his brethren by Fr. Roland Harding in a deed which he drew up in 1537, and styled himself "Prior of the Freres domynyks otherwise named the schode Freres or blake freyers." (Palmer, "Friar-Preachers of Newcastle-on-Tyne" in the *Reliquary*, Jan., 1878, p. 164.) Schode or Shod refers to the use of shoes by the Dominicans, who unlike some other Orders did not go barefoot.

After the middle of the fifteenth century the name Blackfriars became fairly general, and at the Suppression nearly all Dominican houses are spoken of by the king's visitors as "Blackfriars." It is true that one of the first Dominican bishops, Anian de Nanneu of St. Asaph (1268-92) was called "the black brother of Nanneu"—in Welsh "Y brawd du o Nanneu"—but on enquiry we find that the phrase occurs only in the continuation of the "Brut y tywysogion" in the Penarth M.S. 20, which is a *sixteenth* century production (*Flintshire Historical Journal*, 1914-1915, p. 10).

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