

## THE BLACKFRIARS CODEX

RECENTLY the Dominicans of Blackfriars, Oxford, have become possessors, through the munificence of Miss Jean Smith, of a most valuable liturgical manuscript, a Dominican Gradual, which on examination proves to be contemporary with the establishment of the Order's special rite by Humbert de Romans between 1254 and 1260. Hitherto only four examples have been known to exist, two of which, including the *Codex Humbertinus*, are in Dominican hands. Now this newly discovered Codex has been returned to the Order that produced it, but whereas the *Codex Humbertinus* was recovered, during the French Revolution, only at a great price, the Blackfriars MS. was most munificently restored, as a free gift, by one to whom the English Dominican Province thus owes a tremendous debt of gratitude.

The volume was undoubtedly written between 1254 and 1263, seeing that it contains the Mass of St. Peter Martyr but lacks those of St. Anthony of Padua and St. Edward the Confessor, whose feasts respectively were ordered to be celebrated throughout the Order by the General Chapters of Barcelona in 1261 and of London in 1263; whilst the Mass of Corpus Christi, with its famous sequence *Lauda Sion*, granted to the Order in 1264 has been inserted by a later hand between the *de Tempore* and the *Proprium Sanctorum*. The book throughout is written in extremely well-executed lettering, each minuscule letter being 5 cm. high, and there is an abundance of ornamented capitals done exclusively in blue and red, all of exquisite workmanship. The whole consists of 235 folios on vellum, each folio measuring 35.5 × 25 cm. The top margins have been cut to the extent of 5.5 cm. and those at the side 1.5 cm., these measurements giving 41 × 26.5 cm. as the original dimensions. The MS. is in an exceptionally good condition, despite its daily use for many centuries, thanks to the strong fine-textured vellum on which it is written. One folio in the *de Tempore* has been extracted, unfortunately the middle page of the Litany of Saints in the Office of Holy Saturday, and another containing portions of two sequences at the end of the book.

## BLACKFRIARS

Several insertions have been made, some quite late either in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries, but these later ones are only of interest in so far as they prove how long a period the book was used. The only insertion that is intrinsically of value is the Office of Corpus Christi done on four folios and obviously of Spanish execution, probably not much later than the year 1270. The lettering is much inferior to the original and the ink on the flesh sides of the vellum much faded, due not entirely to the poor surface of the vellum, contrasting sharply with the main MS. of which the ink as well as the vellum is most likely of English preparation, although the MS. itself may have been executed in France. It must have been commissioned very early by the Province of Spain, in which country we know it was already at the time the Office of Corpus Christi was inserted; and Miss Jean Smith's father purchased it when acting as British Consul in that country. It had evidently shared the fate of other art treasures when in 1835 a revolutionary government suppressed all the religious houses, selling their books and treasures at much below their real value to defray the expenses of the civil war.

To estimate the liturgical value of the MS. a word must be said on the origin of the Dominican liturgy and of the four other codices. In mediæval Europe several rites were acknowledged and these again were divided up into various usages; these latter, often mistakenly called rites, were very numerous. Thus in England we had the Sarum, York, Hereford, Bangor and others of less importance. Now for an Order widespread as that of Friars Preachers this was a great drawback, so that many demands were made for unity during the first thirty years of the Order's life. At last the General Chapter held at Cologne in 1245 appointed four friars, one from each of the Provinces of France, England, Lombardy, and Germany, to make a complete revision of the existing liturgical books then used in the Order. They were ordered to meet in the Convent of Angers not later than the feast of Rémi (October 1st, 1245), to which convent copies were to be sent from all the Provinces, and after correcting, co-ordinating and remedying deficiencies they

#### THE BLACKFRIARS CODEX

were to put forward a complete and unified set of liturgical volumes. The work was necessarily slow and not all of it to the satisfaction of the brethren. Accordingly, the General Chapter held at Buda in 1254 commissioned the newly elected Master General, Humbert de Romans, to supervise personally the completion of the task, and this commission was approved and sanctioned by the Chapters of Milan, 1255, and of Paris, 1256. By order of the next Chapter held at Florence in 1257 the work was to be completed and embodied in one great volume, to be deposited in the central house of the Order, St. Jacques Convent in Paris, where it was to serve as the exemplar from which all other books were to be copied. The work was completed in 1259 and consisted of fourteen books, the Ordinary, Antiphony, Lectionary, Psalter, Collectarium, Martyrology, Processional, Gradual, great Missal, lesser Missal, Pulpitary, books of the Epistles and Gospels, and portable Breviary. This splendid MS. called the Archetype or Codex Humbertinus is now preserved at the headquarters of the Order in Rome, having been bought back in 1847 by Master General Ancarani after it had been traced to a bookseller, M. Richard. The second Codex is *Additional MS.* no. 23935 in the British Museum and is the identical copy made immediately after the completion of the Archetype, for the personal use of Humbert and his successors, who were to take it with them on visitations to correct faulty copies. This MS. lacks two books, the minor missal and breviary, as the General would in any case have his own portable missal and breviary. It bears Humbert's autograph note to this effect. The third existing Codex is that of Salamanca, containing four books, the Antiphony, Pulpitary, Gradual, and Processional, but it is in an extremely poor condition, having been used chorally, whereas the two former were never so used. The only other known Codex was advertised in 1921 in the catalogue of the well-known bookseller Karl W. Hiersemann of Leipsic. Like the Blackfriars MS. it consists of the Gradual only and is of the same date (1254-63).

WALTER GUMBLEY, O.P.