

within its octave, the public is admitted both to the convent and to the Casa degli Esercizi Pii—the successor to the old Palazzo Ponziani—in Trastevere. The custom grew up for those who attended the festival to bring offerings of violets and place them at the foot of the high altar in the church or at her shrine in the crypt. Relics are shown and, in the convent, the rooms whose walls are covered with scenes from her life; the colours are clear and bright, and over the years the paintings have suffered little damage. Wherever St Frances of Rome is depicted in art she is shown, as in the statuary group and in these murals, with her guardian angel by her side. The main part of the convent is very old and has a fine marble staircase, and beautifully carved and heavily gilded ceilings which give one some idea of fifteenth-century magnificence. The cell occupied by St Frances is now set apart as an oratory and an altar occupies nearly one-third of the small room. The chapel now used is a beautiful modern building; the sacristy is one of the richest in Rome and many of its treasures are the gifts of princesses and noble ladies who have entered the order.

‘His angel hath been my keeper, both going hence and abiding there . . . and the Lord hath not suffered me, his handmaid, to be defiled.’ (Judith xiii, 20.)



## DOMINICAN DEVOTION IN FOURTEENTH- FIFTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

DESMOND MURRAY, O.P.

**Y**OU would hardly expect to find any remains of the effigies of the Dominican saints in England today, after the great clearance made at the time of the Reformation. From 1221, the year St Dominic died, until the end of Mary's reign in 1558, or for three hundred years, there had been a continuous Dominican life throughout the kingdom.

It is amazing how quickly it spread and took root in most of the principal towns of England and Wales. In no other country

were so many priories founded in so short a space of time. At the suppression, there were over a hundred, with an estimated number of nearly two thousand friars.

The eastern counties seem to have been the stronghold, and it is here that relics—strange as it may seem—have survived to the present day, in stone, alabaster, wood and glass.

(a) The magnificent early fourteenth-century re-table of wood at Thornham Parva, Suffolk, near Eye, measures 12ft. 6in. by 3ft. The panels are richly coloured, containing the figures of the crucifixion, with the blessed Virgin Mary and St John; SS Peter and Paul, St John Baptist, St Dominic, St Peter Martyr, St Edward of England, St Catherine of Alexandria and St Catherine of Antioch. A photograph of the three separate panels in black and white is given by Fr W. Hinnebusch, O.P., in his *The Early English Friar Preachers*, (Rome, 1953).

This relic was discovered some years ago in a mansion nearby, where it must have lain for centuries, and when the place was sold up it was given to the nearby small church.

It is thought never to have been used in any priory but was probably painted for the priories of either Norwich, Ipswich or Thetford, which are near at hand.

It seems a great pity that this fine relic of the ancient province is not better known, or reproductions of it made for some present-day priory such as Cambridge, for example. To appreciate its beauty and richness of colouring it has to be seen.

(b) Another, perhaps more extraordinary 'find', which had been walled up, was found by accident in 1869, in the church at Barling, Essex. Barling is four miles south of Shoeburyness on a tributary of the River Crouch, surrounded by cornfields. This is a fifteenth-sixteenth-century coloured statuette of St Dominic made of alabaster, 12 to 15in. high, discovered with a similar one of the blessed Virgin Mary. They are now preserved in the vestry of the church. Both are decapitated, but the colouring remains. That of the blessed Virgin Mary, a seated figure, is vested in an azure mantle powdered over with gold *fleur de lis*, and evidently once held the figure of the holy child, but the figure is broken away; that of St Dominic is vested in the habit of the order, holding in his right hand a staff, most probably of a tall cross, and in the left hand a book. Wire loops are attached to the back of each, to secure them in their niches. (Cfr. *Essex Archaeol. Soc. IV.* 1869,

where the above description is given but no illustration.) It may be said with confidence that this is a quite unknown relic and that it is unique.

(c) In glass, SS Dominic and Peter Martyr are again represented in the fifteenth-century east window of the fine church at Long Melford, Suffolk. (Cfr. Camby, *Suffolk Churches*.)

(d) A screen-panel at Horsham Church (St Faith's), Norfolk, shows a painted figure of St Catherine of Siena; the church dates from 1528.

(e) A fresco said to represent St Thomas Aquinas occurs on the nave pillar of South Berstead Church, Sussex, near Bognor.

(f) Lastly there is the stone crucifix, 4 to 5ft. high, with what appears to be a dragon curled around the base, that was found a few years since, on the site of the Dominican Priory at King's Lynn, Norfolk. This has been placed under the archway of the ruins of Greyfriars within the township, and certainly once belonged to the order.

There may be other similar pre-Reformation treasures to be found in out of the way places; there is for instance one church dedicated to St Dominic and one of the original churches remains (the only one) at Norwich, built about 1460. The nave is 124ft. by 32ft. and the north and south aisles 124ft. by 16ft. It is now known as St Andrew's Hall. Here then is ample material to show that Dominican devotion must have been widespread in England before the Reformation.



## GAMALIEL

(Questions should be addressed to Gamaliel, c/o the Editor, THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT, Hawkesyard Priory, Rugeley, Staffs.)

Q. Is it ever permissible for a Catholic to take his own life? I mean of course when the motive is a noble one, not escapism. I am thinking of Bl. Nicholas Owen, who is alleged to have committed suicide in the Tower for fear of giving away Fr