

REVIEWS

HISTORY

THE EARLY DOMINICANS. By R. F. Bennett. (Cambridge University Press; 10s. 6d.)

This book is a tribute at once to the author's industry and historical knowledge. He makes no attempt to write a history of the early Dominicans, but he has made a most praiseworthy effort to picture the Order in its observance and its work in its first great age. No attention should be made to the unscholarly notice on the "jacket" which credits Mr. Bennett with suggesting "the reasons for the Order's final decay." Such a remark must be as obnoxious to the author as it is to his reader, and the Cambridge University Press might at least have spared us it. All that Mr. Bennett claims to show is that by the end of the thirteenth century laxity had set in throughout the Order, so that the Preachers from that date "begin their long period of decline." "Final decay" which extends from 1300 to 1937 is a curious decay indeed. Bennett's own word "decline" is much more manageable, as it gives a chance of return to health. That the Order did return to health is of course a matter of history. Am I misjudging the author in suggesting he has stressed over much Père Mortier's description of the decline of the Order at the time of the Master-General, Munio de Zamora?

In point of fact the Order did, as was natural, lose its first fervour. It would be beyond human expectation to suppose otherwise. But it grew into something more ordinary and solid if less reminiscent of the days of *Fioretti* and the *Vitae Fratrum*. To talk of a long decline is unhistorical when we consider the subsequent great glory of its saints, preachers and doctors. On p 71 the author states that by about 1300 the best minds of the Order were devoted to mysticism, and then mentions St. Catherine of Siena, Eckhart, Suso and Tauler—none of whom were writing till some years afterwards. In fact, the study of theology far from ceasing with the thirteenth century, went on steadily increasing. The English Province, in the early fourteenth century the largest in the Order, did not come to its greatness till the end of the thirteenth century. Nearly all its greatest doctors flourished between 1290 and 1390. Sutton, Macclesfield, Jorz, Hotham, Trivet, Boraston, Walleys, and Holcot are but a few of the great English Dominican doctors between 1290 and 1340. The 1390 period was almost equally brilliant with Ringstead, Palmer, Bromyard, Claxton and Dymoke. The sixteenth century, the age of Protestantism, saw the Dominican Order at great strength. Were not close on eighty Dominicans present at Trent during the sessions of that greatest of all General Councils? Could the 13th century show

a greater group of theologians than did the Order in the 16th? Are not names like Cajetan, Francis de Vitoria, Melchior Cano, Sixtus Senensis, Santes Pagnini, Carranza, and Bañez household names still in the realms of theology and scripture?

In his valuable chapters on preaching, the author might with profit have availed himself of other works besides those of St. Cher, Humbert, and Bromyard; not that these were not great men, but the value of his thesis would have been enhanced had he quoted from many extant sermons of men like Holcot and Walleys, though it is true the latter's works are still in manuscript. Had he used these and perhaps those of some of the better known foreign friars, he would not have had to place so much reliance on Bromyard who lived long after the period he has chosen.

From his references to the Order's later periods, made in his final paragraph, it would appear he has not read the later volumes of Mortier or he would not have been content to mention only the names of Raymund of Capua, Bromyard, Fra Angelico, and Savonarola, as showing that "so brightly-lit a way was never entirely darkened." Surely if names are to be mentioned at all they should include the greatest—St. Vincent Ferrer, St. Antoninus, and Cardinal John Torquemada. The first was undoubtedly the most successful preacher the Order has ever produced, St. Antoninus was the model of bishops, in addition to his theological renown, whilst as a theologian Torquemada, a relative perhaps of Thomas the Inquisitor, has probably been surpassed only by SS. Thomas and Albert and Cardinal Cajetan. If it is a question of *observance* the fifteenth century produced more beatified and canonized saints than any but the thirteenth, and almost as many as that.

Keeping within his period the author is very fair and accurate and necessary corrections seem few. We would call attention to a misprint on p. 85 where Reginald of Orleans is called Raymund. On p. 54 in the last line but one "Prior-Provincial" should be read for "Oxford lector." On p. 132 there is an exaggeration in the number of prelates drawn from the Dominican Order between 1220 and 1320. The figure is about 350, not 450, as can be seen from the lists given in the *Analecta Ordinis Praedicatorum*, 1925 to 1926. This periodical, which contains so much valuable original work on Dominican History since its first appearance in 1893, does not seem to be known to Mr. Bennett. He has relied in this particular case on the very unsatisfactory lists appended to an otherwise first-class authority, the *Bullarium O.P.*

On p. 150 there is some confusion concerning silence at meals. The Acts themselves are not very clear, but in many cases, most in fact, they refer to silence *in mensa* when the friars were

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dining outside the common refectory, and that is the reason why the Master-General of the Order, the Franciscan Minister-General, Electors of the Empire, and bishops were permitted to dispense all the friars dining with them from silence. This could also be done by the Prior-Provincial, whereas the Conventual Prior could give permission to only one other friar to speak with himself. All this is made very clear by Fontana, *Constitutiones O.P.*, a work that would have greatly helped the author. It does not appear, however, that he has used it. In Appendix iii a very incorrect impression is given concerning Dominican devotion to Mass, through ignorance of the position the Conventual Mass occupied in all monastic Orders. The insistence on hearing *one Mass* has consequently bewildered the author who attributes it to some unsacerdotal tendency in St. Dominic and his Order. The explanation, a quite simple one, is that the Conventual Mass forming the principal part, the centre in fact, of the divine office, had to be attended by all, just as all had to be present at Matins. That particular Mass was a community obligation. "*Matutinas et missam simul audiant fratres nostri.*" This obligation, it is needless to add, was not "typical" of the Dominican Order; it has been the rule through many centuries of all religious Orders and resident Cathedral Chapters. Of course the friars who were priests, like St. Dominic who "*fere singulis diebus celebravit missam*" said Mass daily and these many private Masses were served by the students, novices and lay-brothers.

On pp. 24 and 52 the impression is given that the attendance of St. Dominic's seven companions at the lectures of Alexander Stavensby rests only on a tradition, preserved by Blessed Humbert; but as the latter was already a Dominican of fourteen years standing when Alexander died in 1238 tradition is scarcely the correct word. Moreover the English friar Nicholas Trivet, although much later, also relates it as a fact.

These criticisms however are not intended to belittle the extreme value of Mr. Bennett's book, which is an earnest endeavour to give a living picture of the work done by one of the greatest organizations the middle ages gave to the Catholic Church.

WALTER GUMBLEY, O.P.

MISCELLANEOUS

NORTH COUNTRY. By Edmund Vale. (Batsford; 7s. 6d.)

This is perhaps the best volume of the very fine series from Messrs. Batsford under the general heading *The Face of Britain*.

Mr. Vale explains in his preface that he has chosen, in pre-