

## *Blackfriars*

We select these criticisms out of many that occurred to us as we read these erudite pages. The book is a challenge to the scholars who have occupied themselves with St. Benedict and his Rule, and we look forward with the greatest interest to the debate which must ensue.

J.M.

THE DOMINICANS. By Father John-Baptist Reeves, O.P. (Sheed & Ward; 2/6.)

If Father John-Baptist Reeves has any advantage over the other writers in this series it is because he has the easier task of dealing with an Order which has remained always consistent with itself, faithful to the aims of its founder, and conspicuous for a very remarkable unity. It is an orderly Order; its history has been orderly, uncomplicated by disruptions, revivals and reforms; and Father Reeves writes of it in orderly fashion. This orderliness was the legacy left by St. Dominic himself who, like a wise architect, built upon foundations that would endure: he assured permanence by giving his friars not an iron rule, but a masterly constitution which placed in the hands of the brethren the power of regulating the affairs of the Order and of establishing and changing its laws. The elective system which exists in the Dominican Order is frequently quoted as proof of its democratic character. Fr. Reeves is careful to point out that St. Dominic was by instinct and reason more disposed to prefer monarchy to any other form of government. 'If a democrat is a man who thinks in terms of his own rights and other men's duties, the name ought never to be given to St. Dominic.' But if a democrat is one who loves the liberty of the sons of God, and yet worships authority and obedience; who allows the ruled to choose their ruler, and yet places safeguards against unchecked absolutism and all forms of tyranny and gives the same subjects the right to revise their choice and unseat and even punish their former ruler, then surely St. Dominic is the ideal democrat whose preference for monarchy will be shared by the truly democratic.

St. Dominic was the first founder to establish a religious Order in which authority, under the supreme command of a single ruler, is exercised through a graduated hierarchy. Every religious Order since his time has in the main followed his general plan. He built his constitution on lines parallel with the hierarchical system he found existing in the Church. His conservatism, as Fr. Reeves points out, is indistinguishable from the Apostolicity and Catholicity of the papacy. His pro-

gressiveness was of the daring kind that can only be described as revolutionary and his Order, which laid no claim even to be a new Order, sometimes shocked the monks of an older tradition by its glaring innovations. The idea of universal preaching entrusted to simple priests and religious was entirely novel; communal poverty added to the personal poverty of the religious was not advocated before the time of St. Francis and St. Dominic; study as an absolute duty binding each cleric more strictly than the choral office and superseding the old monastic manual labour was another of St. Dominic's innovations; dispensation as a law and life-giving force and not as a mere merciful concession to weakness was a new element in monastic life which the traditionalists must have considered paradoxical. St. Dominic, wise statesman and prudent legislator, conceived and worked out his great idea so that everything should subserve the single apostolic purpose of winning souls to Christ and furthering God's kingdom on earth.

Fr. Reeves has earned our thanks for his clear, concise account of the Dominican ideal and Constitution. His attractive presentation of its supernatural common sense will strike even those who know it intimately with all the freshness of a surprise.

K.

THE FRANCISCAN ORDER : An Essay on its spirit and history.  
By Dominic Devas, O.F.M. (Burns, Oates & Wash-  
bourne; 3/6.)

Father Dominic Devas approaches his subject in a manner entirely different from that of Father Reeves. In just over a hundred pages he casts a rapid glance over seven centuries of Franciscan history and in that way he presents a vivid impressionist view of the Franciscan spirit and ideal. He is aware of the difficulty of his task and he is prepared to admit that the history of his Order is prickly with controverted points. He faces squarely the fact of 'the intricate and unending ramifications' of the different Franciscan groups, but he finds a point of unity and a key to this problem of diversity in the *Fioretti* or *Little Flowers of St. Francis*. The *Fioretti* divides into two; first the scenes depicting Francis, the active apostle; and secondly the series of incidents illustrating the contemplative lives of some of his early disciples. 'In this twofold division all Franciscan history lies mirrored.' It is the old human story of the divine discontent that eats into every generous heart—the active apostle yearning always for solitude and for the untrammelled pursuit of holiness. And this noble longing is a particu-