

VI.

THE OLD BLACKFRIARS OF GLASGOW. BY REV. J. PRIMROSE,
M.A., F.S.A. SCOT.

The principal source of our information on this subject is the volume published in 1846 by Dr Joseph Robertson for the Maitland Club, entitled *Liber Collegii Nostre Domine*, and the *Munimenta Fratrum Predicatorum de Glasgu*. This volume, needless to say, is marked by the wide and accurate scholarship characteristic of its accomplished editor. Indeed, so thoroughly has the task been performed, that it still remains the standard authority concerning the ancient Dominicans or Blackfriars of Glasgow. It may be observed, however, that Prior Conway of the Dominican Convent, Salford, Manchester, has a volume passing through the press entitled *Scotia Dominicana*, taking up the history of the Order pertaining not only to Glasgow but to the whole of Scotland, from 1230 A.D. to 1559 A.D.—a volume which contains the results of years of research among the archives of the Order kept at Rome, as well as among the Vatican archives.

But confining attention to Dr Joseph Robertson's preface to the *Liber Collegii*, there are two slight inaccuracies that should be mentioned. The first is at p. 40, in the supposed identification of Greyfriars Wynd with a vennel which, about the year 1300, was called the vennel of the Friars Preachers. To make the matter plain, let me say, that while the Blackfriars settled in Glasgow in 1246, it was not till 1476, over two centuries later, that the rival Order of the Greyfriars came to the city. As it happened, the Greyfriars erected their buildings on the opposite side of the street from the Blackfriars, but at a considerable distance back from the front of the street, as was customary with the lowly-minded followers of St Francis. Each of their houses, however, had a vennel or wynd contiguous to their respective properties, the one known as the Blackfriars, the other as the Greyfriars Wynd.

The inaccuracy, then, occurs through Dr Robertson identifying these

two wynds, a mistake into which he was led, in all probability, by the ambiguity of the description of vacant ground contained in a record of the year 1300, as quoted in the foot-note.

The second inaccuracy results from the mistaken interpretation of an entry in the wardrobe accounts of King Edward I. Mr Joseph Bain, in his Rhind Lectures, *The Edwards in Scotland*, pp. 35-36, has drawn attention to this point. Not only Dr Robertson, but other historians have asserted that Edward I., during his visit to Glasgow in 1301, resided within the Convent of the Blackfriars, and that he recompensed their hospitality by a donation of six shillings. It appears, however, as Mr Bain shows, that the six shillings was a donation to the Blackfriars towards providing them, for the space of three days, with a better diet than they were usually accustomed to. The likelihood is that Edward I., who carried about with him in his Scottish campaigns a portable chapel, in a wagon drawn by ten oxen, would not reside, when in Glasgow, even in the Bishop's Palace, seeing that the Bishop in those days was Robert Wishart, that patriotic Scotsman who was a source of considerable trouble to Edward, and who more than once rebelled against his claims of supremacy. King Edward, we should imagine, would encamp with his soldiers on the field.

But passing from these slight inaccuracies to refer to some of the many excellencies of this volume on the Old Blackfriars of Glasgow.

It preserves for us the older topography of Glasgow, and is specially valuable in furnishing us with the older spelling of the place-names of the city and neighbourhood, these being gathered together alphabetically in the index. The most ancient document, however, relating to Glasgow, and which in this respect is of the greatest importance, is the Inquest of David I., drawn up early in the 12th century, and edited in 1901 by Mr J. T. T. Brown. Here we possess the earliest spelling of the place-names about Glasgow, but which in several cases are difficult to identify, through the blundering, probably, of the French ecclesiastic who transcribed them.

Another excellency of this volume on the Old Blackfriars is that it

contains one of the earliest specimens of the vernacular of Glasgow, in one of the Munimenta, dated 1433. This deed represents John Flemyn of Cowglen conveying to the Blackfriars a rood of land adjoining their place in the High Street, on certain conditions, viz., that the prior and convent undertake to pay 10s. yearly, and to find stabling for two horses to the said John Flemyn, "quhen hym lykis tyll cum tyll do hys errandis or mak residens, within the town; & attour gyf it lykis the said Johne Flemyn tyll cum & dwell within Glasgu, the said Prior sall byg tyll the said John an honest hall chamir & butler with a yard for to set cale in." ¹

Another of the Munimenta, dated 1454, gives us interesting sidelights into the religious life of Glasgow in pre-Reformation days. It shows, for example, how powerfully the belief in Purgatory was held. John Stewart, described as the first Provost that was in Glasgow, stipulates in his will that mass be offered for his soul every Friday in the year at St Katherine's altar in the Blackfriars Kirk, St Katherine of Sienna being a favourite saint among the Blackfriars; also that, on the anniversary of his decease they should cause St Mungo's bell—a quadrangular shaped handbell, and one of Glasgow's most venerable relics—to be rung through the city, calling upon passers-by to pray that day for the souls of the departed named by the bellman. Further, the will stipulates that "Dirige" and "Placebo" be chanted in their choir, "Dirige" being a portion of the 5th Psalm and "Placebo" a portion of the 116th Psalm, the former being sung at matins, the latter at vespers. While a farther stipulation was, that a mass be sung at St Katherine's altar by the whole convent; every friar—and it is said there were no fewer than thirty—receiving, to quote the original, "sex penyis & a galoun of the best sale ale of the town to the conventis collacioun." ²

Another glimpse of these Old Blackfriars is obtained from the Glasgow Protocols, Nos. 37, 138, 161, 1286, edited by Mr Robert Renwick, Depute Town Clerk, and the greatest living authority on the history of Glasgow. From these documents it appears that the altar of the B.V.M.

¹ *Munimenta*, pp. 166-167.

² *Munimenta*, pp. 177-178.

in the Blackfriars Church was a favourite spot on which money was placed in presence of witnesses when property was being redeemed. Even years after the Reformation, when the altar had been removed, the same practice obtained at the site of the ancient altar, as if a peculiar sanctity attached to business of that kind transacted there.

There is now no trace of the buildings, added to at successive times, of these Old Blackfriars of Glasgow. The last of the ruins was removed many years ago. It would appear, however, that the ancient church of the Blackfriars, erected in the time of William de Bondington, Bishop of Glasgow, he who erected the elegant choir and crypt of the Cathedral, was a splendid edifice. M'Ure, in his *History of Glasgow*, published in 1736, quotes Mr Miln, architect to King Charles I., and who surveyed it in 1638, as saying, "that it had not its parallel in all Scotland, except Whittairn in Galloway." Captain Slezer, in his *Theatrum Scotiæ*, published in 1693, furnishes a bird's eye view of the College of Glasgow and the adjacent Church of the Blackfriars. But the style of the church building he represents does not approach the standard one would expect from the description given by M'Ure. Probably the exterior had been considerably altered before that view was taken. We know from various sources that after the Reformation the church fell into a ruinous condition and was several times repaired. Again, in 1670, it was struck by lightning and so destroyed that a new church was erected in 1699 on the same site. This came to be known as the College Church, and it continued till 1877, when it was removed to make way for railway extension.

After the Reformation the endowments and property of the Old Blackfriars were transferred to the possession of the College or University of Glasgow. There is, however, one reminder of this ancient Order in daily use, in the impression of the seal of one of its Priors, as the inscription round its margin informs us. In the centre of the seal is an effigy of St John the Evangelist, who holds in his right hand the active sword representing the Word of God, while in his left he holds the chalice, with three nails above it, the chalice and the nails symbolising

the Last Supper and the Passion. This seal, it appears, was that of Prior John Spens, B.D., who was Superior of the Order in Glasgow, 1517-1519.

In bringing this paper to a close, it may not be amiss to state that the Blackfriars, as a rule, settled in University and cathedral cities ; for while the Greyfriars sought, like the modern Salvationists, to evangelise the masses, the Blackfriars, on the other hand, gave prominence to work among the classes. They paid great attention to preaching the Word, which they considered was sadly neglected in the 12th century by the clergy, who were too prone to substitute ritual for preaching, or, as we should say, the service for the sermon. Hence, from the emphasis the Blackfriars gave to preaching, they were styled the Order of Friars Preachers, among their most eloquent representatives being John de Vicenza and Savonarola of Florence.

Another point meriting attention is that the Blackfriars have ever been regarded by the Church of Rome as the upholders of orthodoxy and defenders of the faith ; hence their association with the terrible atrocities of the Inquisition. Although St Dominic, the founder of the Order, has been cleared of all complicity with the Inquisition, his followers undoubtedly were among the leading persecutors of what they styled heresy. This explains why Prior Alexander Campbell of the Blackfriars acted as accuser of Patrick Hamilton of St Andrews, 1528, and why later on, in 1556, John Knox was summoned to appear in the Blackfriars Church, Edinburgh.