

The Franciscans in Hertfordshire.

A Note in Commemoration: 1224—1924.

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“**I**N the year of the Lord 1224, in the time of the Lord Pope Honorius, in the same year, that is, in which the Rule of the blessed Francis was by him confirmed, and in the eighth year of the Lord King Henry, son of John, on the Tuesday after the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, which that year fell upon a Sunday, the Friars Minor first arrived in England, landing at Dover. They were four clerics and five lay-brethren.”¹ Thus opens brother Thomas of Eccleston’s narrative “Of the coming of the Friars Minor [or Franciscans] into England,” compiled probably about forty years after that first landing. At recent celebrations of the seventh hundred anniversary of the event, Eccleston’s picturesque account of the heroic pioneers pressing on to Canterbury, from thence to London, and so eventually to Oxford and other important towns, has been re-told. There is no need to linger, therefore, about those first guest-houses on the road, around the school-house fire at Canterbury, or the kitchen fire at Salisbury, where ill-fed and weary friars made merry over the wretched beer-dregs, or in the little cells erected in Cornhill with their lining of dried grass. When did the brethren first reach Hertfordshire in days of extreme poverty, simplicity and holy joy? We do not know.

Something more than mere chance would seem to have marked out St. Albans and Ware as the only places in the County now to be definitely associated with Franciscan activities in the years that follow. They must represent the two strategic points, as it were, in the first advance from the capital, northwards. As soon as that advance was begun, the Friar Minor was bound to set foot on Hertfordshire soil. If he were leaving London by Watling Street, St. Albans would be, doubtless, his stopping-place at the end of the first day’s journey, if by Ermine Street, then Ware, both towns a little over twenty miles

¹ Eccleston, *De Adv. Min.*, cap. 1. (*Lat. text ed.* A. G. Little [*Coll. des anc. textes*], etc.); an *Engl. trans.* in Father Cuthbert’s “*The Friars, and how they came to England*,” Sands, 1903, p. 131, et seq.

distant. From a casual remark passed by Matthew Paris in his Chronicle, we learn that there was actually a little hospice (*hospitium*), newly built and furnished within the monastery precinct at St. Albans, by the year 1247, set apart expressly for the use of Franciscan and Dominican travellers on the road.² Similarly, Ware too may have possessed some kind of hospice, long before the Friary was founded here in the fourteenth century. Its association with two Friars Minor of the previous century certainly suggests some earlier centre of Franciscan enterprise in the neighbourhood. A further stage in the evangelisation of Hertfordshire by the new missionaries, this time from the North, is reached with the foundation of the House at Cambridge, between the years 1226 and 1236. Here, at the first, was that little chapel

“ so very humble that a carpenter fashioned and set up in one day fourteen bundles of planks ” for its erection,³ where “ on the feast of St. Lawrence, though there were as yet but three brethren, namely brother W[illiam] of Esseby, brother Hugh of Bugeton, both clerics, and a novice named brother Elias, who was so lame that he had to be carried into the choir, they sang the office solemnly to note, and the novice wept so much that the tears ran freely down his face.”

But when this convent increased, the brethren must soon have spread southward over the borders of the home county into our own, on their preaching expeditions. For we have definite evidence later that a good deal of the Northern part of Hertfordshire lay within the Cambridge “ limits.” From the contemporary anecdotes of English Franciscans we can still picture them setting out from the friary, two by two, in true Apostolic fashion, according to their Rule—

“ one first, the other following his steps
like Minor friars journeying on their road,”⁴

as Dante saw them in Italy. Like “ brother Ralph of Swyneland once coming from London with his companion,”⁵ they will put up for the night at some humble

² Chron. Maj., (Rolls S.) iv., p. 600.

³ Eccleston, *De Adv. Min.*, cap. iii. (Father Cuthbert, [p. 153] has mistranslated here).

⁴ cf. Jack Upland to the Friar, in 1401,—“ What betokyneth that ye goe tweine and tweine together?” (See Wright's *Pol. Poems and Songs*, Rolls S., vol. ii., p. 27).

⁵ MS. Gray's Inn Libr. 15, fol. 31.

lodging offered them in a Hertfordshire village. There around the crackling logs they partake of the simple fare set before them, turning after meal-time to listen to the good-wife's gossip before retiring to rest. On the morrow they may rise before dawn, perhaps to wander in the meadows for a while and enjoy the unearthly charms of sunrise;⁶ then hasten on their way to preach and hear confessions again.

Mention of friars connected with our county is as rare for this early period as indeed for any other. Thomas of Eccleston mentions one, Brother Hugh de Baldoc, "of happy memory,"⁷ who after assiduous study at the Schools was actually the first found worthy to be given the office of preacher in the Order. But that is apparently all we know of this once fragrant personality. One precious fragment of a Hertfordshire Franciscan's autobiography, however, surviving in a manuscript of his own Homilies in praise of the Blessed Virgin, now in the Library of the Honourable Society of Grays Inn,⁸ gives vivid insight into the sufferings and heroism of young converts at this stage. Friar Robert of Ware tells us in the Prologue to his *Rosarium* how, as an undergraduate at Oxford, early in the second half of the thirteenth century, he was attracted to the Order of St. Francis, like other youthful enthusiasts of the time, and joined himself to it, to the grief and bitter disappointment of his parents. After every available form of persuasion had been tried, and even schemes set on foot for a formal release in the Church Courts, Robert's exasperated father, finding that nothing would shake his son's resolve to remain a Franciscan, lost patience, and cast him off for ever. When friar Robert visited his old home at Ware, on one occasion, he was driven from the gate, and threatened with death at his own father's hand, if he attempted to enter. It was only a mortal sickness, and the special intervention of Our Lady herself appearing to the

⁶ For actual references, etc., see my forthcoming "*Preaching in Mediæval England*," (Camb. Univ. Press), chap. ii.

⁷ (*bonae memoriae*). Eccleston, as before, cap. v. (Cuthbert's trans., p. 159).

⁸ MS. Gray's Inn Libr. 7, fol. 62. For full account, see my art.—"*Some Franciscan Memorials at Gray's Inn*," in the *Dublin Review*, April—June, 1925, pp. 280-284.

obstinate sufferer in a dream,⁹ that finally induced the old man to make reconciliation before death. Such were the obstacles which often faced the pioneer.

From the same birth-place came our one Hertfordshire friar accorded the distinction of a brief notice in the Dictionary of National Biography.¹⁰ As *doctor fundatus* he certainly deserves to be called great. For William of Ware, although another figure now all too dim and forgotten, can at least be recognised as a link with the famous English Minorites of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries who made a reputation throughout Christendom for scholastic learning.¹¹ Tradition states that he was a pupil of the celebrated Alexander of Hales, that he spent most of his days at the University of Paris, and that he was himself the master of John Duns Scotus, greatest Franciscan Schoolman of all, who seems to have resided at that University from 1304 to 1307, after leaving Oxford. The limits of the present sketch, however, preclude any attempt at an estimate of William's own contribution to mediæval philosophy.¹² But it may be noted that Mr. Little mentions manuscripts of his *Commentaries on the Sentences* (of Peter Lombard) existing in places as scattered as Oxford, Toulouse, Troyes, Vienna, Florence and Padua.¹³ A copy of the same work was originally in the Library of the Greyfriars House at London.¹⁴

In the absence of other local records to hand, we must be content for the present to view the earlier friars through the eyes of a critical and not unbiassed monk

⁹ The knoll mentioned, on the highway between Hertford and Ware, (*ibid.*, p. 283), can be easily recognised still, where the road mounts a spur of the hills running down to the valley of the Lea beneath.

¹⁰ s.v. *William of Ware*, [fl. c. 1300 (?)], by Miss Bateson, but taken from A. G. Little, *The Grey Friars in Oxford*, (Oxf. Hist. Soc., 1892), p. 213, q. v.

¹¹ cf. the well-known names of Adam de Marisco, Roger Bacon, and William of Ockham, in addition to those mentioned above in the text.

¹² Both Mr. A. G. Little, and Father Ernest Messenger, Ph.D., of St. Edmund's Coll., Ware, have kindly furnished me with lists of articles on William of Ware; *La France Franciscaine*, tom. v., p. 71 seq. (1922), art. on *Guill. de Ware* by E. Langpré; several arts. by Aug. Daniels, etc., in *Franciskan. Studien*, 1915, p. 377, and 1917 (vol. iv.), p. 221; in *Coll. Beiträge zur Gesch. d. Phil. des Mittelalters*, Suppl., 1913, p. 316; in *Quellenbeiträge u. Untersuchungen z. Gesch. d. Gottesbeweise im xiii. jht.*, same series, viii., 1909, p. 102. Some of W. of W.'s *quæstiones* are printed in *Questiones disputatæ de Immac. Concept. B.M.V.*, Quaracchi, 1904.

¹³ See *Oxf. Grey Friars*, as before, p. 213.

¹⁴ See Kingsford's *Greyfriars of London*, in *Brit. Soc. Fr. Stud.*, Series vi., (1915), p. 235.

who sits busily at work upon his Chronicles in the great Benedictine monastery of St. Albans. Matthew Paris became a Benedictine monk of the Abbey in the same year—if we are to believe his own statement¹⁵—as that in which St. Francis preached his famous sermon before Pope Honorius, in Rome, on behalf of the new Order approved but seven years before. To Paris, then, as to other members of religious Orders long-established, the mendicant, when he arrived in England, was likely to appear in a none too friendly light. If the newcomer, clad in his single tunic with knotted cord, began thus by being an object of suspicion, an intruder, an eccentric, he ended by proving himself an all too successful rival, often a hated enemy. Apart from the monastic Chronicler's own account of Franciscan contempt for what he proudly calls "the *authentic* Orders constituted by the holy Fathers, St. Benedict and St. Augustine,"¹⁶ we hear of members of these latter orders in their turn transferring allegiance to the Poverello, like those two adventurous inmates of the Priory of Austin Canons-Regular at Dunstable, who in the year 1233 escaped from their House "without leave," by climbing through a broken window and leaping over the convent wall, to join the Franciscans at Oxford.¹⁷ Add to these records such disputes as occurred at Bury, or at Scarborough,¹⁸ between monks and friars, over the question of sites and privileges for the new friaries, leading occasionally to acts of violence, and it is easy to understand the bitter feeling which grew up between them.

But, to return to Matthew Paris, his first testimony—to quote his own phrase—is to "the primitive poverty and excellence of life of the Friars Minor." In glowing sentences, under the year 1206, he narrates¹⁹ how "in

¹⁵ i.e. 1217.

¹⁶ See *Chron. Maj.*, (Rolls S.), iv., p. 280.

¹⁷ See *Annals of Dunstable*, in *Annales Monast.*, (Rolls S.), vol. iii., p. 133.

¹⁸ For Bury, see Little, in *Studies in Engl. Franc. History*, (Ford Lectures), 1904, p. 96 (*sub anno* 1257). Of the affair at "Scardebure" (cf. *ibid.*, p. 92) Matthew Paris says (*Chr. Maj.*, iv., p. 280)—"in qua Minores turpiter ceciderunt." cf. also the violent language used by Abbot John of Peterboro' agst. the friars in his *Chronic.*, under the year 1224, (quoted by Little, *ibid.*, p. 99).

¹⁹ See *Chron. Maj.*, ii., p. 511, and again his review of the past 50 years in 1250, *ibid.*, v., p. 194-5.

those days the preachers called Minors, suddenly emerging with the favour of Pope Innocent, fill the earth, dwelling in small groups in the towns and cities, owning nothing whatever, living according to the Gospel, preferring utter poverty in food and raiment, going about with bare feet, showing the greatest example of humility to all men. On Sundays and Festivals, leaving their habitations, they preached in the parish churches the Gospel of the Word. . . . The more alien they proved themselves to worldly things and carnal delights, the keener were they found to be in contemplation of the things of heaven. They reserved no kind of sustenance among them until the morrow, that the 'poverty' of spirit which reigned in their hearts might become known to all in deed and habit." Matthew may borrow many of his phrases from Roger of Wendover; but did this impression of the early friars come merely from second or third hand, or was it tinged with a personal experience? There is perhaps more than a hint in favour of the latter theory. In Mr. Little's words, "Matthew Paris was keenly interested in an artist among the early Franciscans."²⁰ The original manuscript of his *Liber Additamentorum* in the Cottonian collection at the British Museum contains a remarkable drawing of the Apocalyptic Christ,²¹ here declared to be "the work of Brother William of the Order of the Minors, companion of the Blessed Francis, and second in that Order, holy in conversation, English by birth." Furthermore, among a series of pen drawings presumably by Matthew himself, in the Corpus Christi College MS. of his Chronicle, at Cambridge, executed between the years 1236 and 1250, besides pictures of St. Francis, there appears a marginal sketch of this same English friar.²² Of this William, personal disciple of the Founder, alas but little is known. Buried at the Church of San Francesco at Assisi, his bones, we are told, "were made famous by miracles." "But at the command of brother Elias, then General, he ceased to perform miracles, through rever-

²⁰ See his art. on "Brother William of England," etc., in *Collect Franc.*, I., (B.S.F. St.), 1914, pp. 1 to 8.

²¹ Reproduction, plate iv., in *ibid.*, with a detailed discussion of the drawing (p. 5), (MS. Cott. Nero D.1, fol. 156).

²² MS., C.C.C., Cambr., xvi., fol. 67 (plate iii. in *ibid.*, and see descrip., p. 4).

ence for the presence of St. Francis." "Blessed brother William of England," remarks the sixteenth-century Register of the London Greyfriars, "who was truly obedient, who obeyed his Guardian after his death!" Was he ever a personal acquaintance of our St. Albans Chronicler, a once welcome visitor to the Abbey Scriptorium, we wonder, leaving behind him undying memories of the holiness of an early friar?²³

Matthew goes on to tell, in his Chronicle, of the sudden downfall of the Order from its pristine grace. With *verba terribilia* he speaks²⁴ of their sumptuous buildings soon towering to regal heights (as may yet be seen at Richmond, in Yorkshire), of lofty walls, vast proportions, and priceless adornment, in glaring contrast to their Founder's *Rule*. No Lollard could have spoken more sarcastically. He tells of the overbearing mien of their inmates, their abuse of the confessional, their extortions from the dying, their flattery in sermons, their greed and jealousy in acquiring privilege, and the confidences of influential persons. Finally he gives us a local reminiscence.²⁵ Two English Franciscans, John and Alexander, were sent by the

Pope, he says, to extort money from England, about the year 1247. After an insolent visit to Bishop Grossetête at Lincoln, they came on to St. Albans, riding noble steeds, ornamented with trappings of gold, themselves resplendent in precious raiment, booted and spurred like knights—"to the injury and shame of their Order and profession." Declining to put up at the hospice for Mendicants at the Abbey, already mentioned, they



G. R. O.
BROTHER WILLIAM OF
ENGLAND, AFTER MATTHEW
PARIS.
(MS. C.C.C. Camb. xvi,
fol. 67.)

²³ He died apparently c. 1232.

²⁴ *Chron. Maj.*, iv., p. 280.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 599-600.

insisted on having the guest-rooms and the reception accorded to prelates and nobility. When later the Abbot humbly but firmly rejected their outrageous demand for four hundred marks down for the Lord Pope, they rode hastily away, murmuring threats of vengeance as they went. Shade of St. Francis!

The evidences of Franciscan degeneracy certainly accumulate as the centuries advance. But we can attribute a good deal in the *Chronica Majora*, no doubt, to the embittered feelings of one stung by mocking taunts about "simple and boorish Cistercians," and the like. The strain of criticism and exposure is maintained by subsequent chroniclers of the Abbey, it is true, gloating fiercely over Mendicant misdemeanours as they occur. Nevertheless, we have good reason to know that happier relations could often exist elsewhere, as in the case of a certain Austin friar, welcome visitor to the monks of Tynemouth Priory, an important cell of our own Abbey, who gracefully dedicates his Treatise on the Creed to the St. Albans Abbot of the day.²⁶

For the rest, a mere name or two in Franciscan annals serves to remind us that from our ancient town, and probably from its monastery too, men did go forth to don the habit of St. Francis. Like Robert of Ware, or that luxurious student at Bologna converted by the Dominican who bade him reflect how hard would be the beds in hell, more than one may have been drawn into the Order by the influence of some magnetic preacher at the University. Thus had the learned physician John of St. Giles, himself a son of St. Albans, "skilled in medicine and theology,"²⁷ and an intimate friend of Franciscans and their patron Bishop Grossetête, been led to don the sister habit of St. Dominic. Among the Minors, a friar William of St. Albans. S.T.P., is recorded as dying at the London House about the year 1327-8.²⁸ A contemporary,

²⁶ John Waldeby, S.T.P., of Yorkshire, d. 1393. For this and other examples see my "Preaching in Med. Engld." One much nearer home occurs in *Annals of Dunstable Priory, Annales Monast.*, iii., p. 290. A Franciscan, fr. Philip de Mertone dies within the walls of Dunstable Priory, and as a friar of some distinction 'is given very decent burial in our cloister' (quia specialis neciter fuit, et lector in ordine suo, in claustris nostris decentissime est humatus). This, in spite of the unfortunate incident of 1233 aforementioned!

²⁷ Matthew Paris, who calls him "Master John of St. Alban's, formerly Dean of the Ch. of St. Quintin, afterwards Treasurer of the Ch. of Salisbury," (*sub anno* 1235), mentions him more than once.

²⁸ See C. L. Kingsford, 'Greyfriars of London,' (B.S. Fr. St.), 1915, p. 68.

friar Robert of St. Albans, licensed in 1323 to hear confessions and preach in the diocese of Canterbury, had risen to be Warden of the Greyfriars at Canterbury.²⁹

It is now time to consider the fortunes of the one House of Friars Minor which was to be established in Hertfordshire at the town of Ware. All the available evidence, from documents as well as from the prevailing silence goes to prove that this friary was among the most obscure of the English Province, "a certain small house," as a contemptuous inhibition calls it. Its history covers a period of exactly two hundred years, from Foundation in 1338 to Dissolution in 1538. Yet for all these two centuries of crowded and stirring events in Church and State there would appear to survive only a paltry dozen references to it in contemporary record.³⁰ With the widest knowledge of English Franciscan history it is impossible to fill in the gaps between these few dry bones of so fragmentary and forlorn-looking a skeleton.

Map in hand, we found it easy enough at the outset to justify the importance and suitability of such a site for men of the road like the Friars Minor. Where the highway forks at this point, on the left through Bedford to the Midlands, on the right through Cambridge into Norfolk, by way of Norwich, or Lynn, eventually two long lines of friaries stretched before the mendicant traveller, giving point to a Lollard's famous gibe—

" And yet ye have more courts
than many lords of England;
for ye now wenden throug the realme,
and ech night will lig
in your own courts,
and so mow but right few lords doe."³¹

The market-town of Ware itself, lying upon the River Lea, was but two and a half miles or so, by road or by

²⁹ See Chas. Cotton, 'Greyfriars of Canterbury,' (B.S. Fr. St.), 1924, pp. 38, 77.

³⁰ I am indebted for many of the references following to the acct. given in *Vict. County Hist. of Hertfordshire*, vol. iii., p. 451. However, that acct., adequate for its purpose, calls for one or two minor amendments. The name of John Bawde, buried in the London Ho., c. 1530, has been omitted from the list of Wardens, (see Kingsford, as above, p. 131); the description given of the Seal is incorrect in at least one particular, (see below later); and one of the bequests to the friary among the Wills publd. in the *Herts Genealogist and Antiquary*, p. 236, has escaped notice.

³¹ J. Upland, 1401. (Wright's *Pol. Poems*, Rolls S., ii., p. 20).

water, from the county-town of Hertford. Here for the friar, seeking always the haunts of men, not a peaceful seclusion, was clearly an additional advantage. Furthermore, Ware lay about half-way between the two most important friaries at London and at Cambridge whither brethren of the Order were continually thronging. No wonder that the little Hertfordshire House, however convenient a stopping-place for the mere passer-by,³² was at length to suffer from its proximity to two such great neighbours. On the eve of the Reformation old Richard Whitford, monk of Syon, erstwhile fellow of Queen's College in the University, looks back in the pages of his *Work for Householders* to a familiar spot in this neighbourhood. What memories he must have enjoyed of friar and pedlar, mountebank and soldier and rustic, jostling around inns and market-places there—"in the hygh waye unto Cambrydge"!

Ware Friary was founded by Thomas, 2nd Lord Wake of Liddell. Heir to a considerable estate on his marriage with Blanche, daughter of Henry of Lancaster, he becomes henceforward a staunch supporter of the Lancastrian cause, and a leading figure in the realm, "the king's kinsman" as men called him. The tale of his eventful life includes a part in foreign embassies, in wars with the Scots, exile and subsequent restoration by King Edward III., imprisonment and release again, down to a peaceful death in 1349. More worthy of our present concern is the fact that he figures—in the words of Professor Tout—"as a conspicuous friend to religious." He founded an oratory for the Crutched Friars³³ at Farndale, in Yorkshire; he had a scheme for importing Dominican nuns from Brabant to England, which was actually sanctioned. He established a priory of Austin Canons in the East Riding, originally near one of his own castles. On the 18th of February, 1338, the royal license was granted him to give to the Friars Minor, so

³² What risks the friar might run in the open is well illustrated by an incident which occurred at Royston, in our county, on the 20th of May, 1394. One, friar Geoffrey Torre, of the London House, was set upon by a band of men armed with swords, bucklers, and daggers, was beaten, wounded, and so roughly treated that his life was in jeopardy. From his servant, John Othe, accompanying him, they took 20s. in gold and silver belonging to the Warden and Convent. (See *Collect Franc.*, ii., pp. 142-3).

³³ A useful acct. of the activities of this somewhat obscure Order in England will be found in *Trans. of the R. Hist. Soc.*, 3rd. Ser., vol. vii., pp. 191-208 (Egerton Beck).

runs the document—"a messuage and seven acres of land in Ware, on which to build an oratory, houses, and other buildings." Papal confirmation follows in a letter of October, 1350:—

"To the Minister General, and Friars Minor. Confirmation of the acceptance by the Minister Provincial, and Friars Minor of the Province of England, of a site in the town of Ware, in the diocese of London, given to them by John Wake, knight, Lord of Lidell, which they accepted by virtue of a general faculty to the Order to accept six sites—three in Italy, three North of the Alps."³⁴

Our Hertfordshire House has started on its career.

The Wake lands and Barony passed in time to the Earls of Kent, and eventually to the family of Holland, through Joan, "The Fair Maid." Thomas Holland, Earl of Kent, and sometime Duke of Surrey was amongst those who suffered forfeiture of lands and dignities at the deposition of King Richard II. in 1399. When a rebellion of the disappointed faction was raised shortly after the accession of the new king Henry IV., Holland, a valiant soldier according to Froissart, took a leading part in it, and was unfortunately captured and beheaded by the mob. An echo of the incident occurs in an item in the Patent Rolls, of February 12th, 1400, relative to our friary:—

"Grant to the Friars Minor of Ware of the underwood of 1 acre within the foreign wood late of Thomas, late Earl of Kent, by the town of Ware, and 2 cartloads of hay in the meadows, late of the said earl there—so long as they are in the king's hands by his forfeiture—with all the fishery of the water running along the length of their house during the same time."³⁵

The crown is not allowed to forget the needs of the little convent on the forfeited estate.

It is a more significant and interesting entry that next engages our attention. Readers of the "Canterbury Tales" will remember Chaucer's allusion in the opening scene of the "Somnour's Tale" to a prominent feature of the Franciscan system:—

"Lordinges, ther is in Yorkshire, as I gesse,
A mersshy contree called Holdernesse,
In which ther wente a *limitour* about,
To preche, and eek to begge, it is no doute."³⁶

³⁴ *Cal. of Papal Letters*, iii., p. 394.

³⁵ *Cal. of Pat. Rolls, 1399-1401*, p. 226. The water mentioned, of course, is that of the River Lea.

³⁶ *Cant. Tales*, ed. Skeat, *Somn. Tale*, ll. 1709-1712.

Begging remained the chief organised means of livelihood for the Mendicants, as it had once been with St. Francis and his primitive followers the genuine mark of their union with the Lady Poverty. As the Order developed a permanent, organised life of its own, it became a regulated system, with definite "*limits*" for alms-seeking assigned to each House, and certain brothers therein licensed as *limitors* to do the begging for their convent. Relative to the distribution of these areas as it affected part of Hertfordshire, a certain Inhibition of September, 1395, is to be found in the Calendar of Papal Letters:—

"At the recent petition of the Custos, guardian, and brethren of the house of Friars Minor at Cambridge, containing that from of old they have, on account of the University there, been wont to receive a very great multitude of brethren of the order, of divers regions and provinces, and to minister to them food and other necessaries out of the procurations of alms from the bounds of their house; and that near the said bounds, in or near Ware, in the diocese of London, a certain small house of the Order, has been founded, whose brethren extend the bounds of their procurations so far towards Cambridge and other parts that the said multitude incurs very great loss—*Inhibition* to the said brethren of Ware to extend their bounds for the purpose of making procurations of alms or preachings, more than 5 miles towards any part, which before their foundation belonged to the bounds of the House at Cambridge, except to the town of Poketich [Puckeridge] in the said diocese." Concurrent Mandate to the Archbishop of York, and the Bishops of London and Ancona.³⁷

This undignified squabble over the "*limits*" of two Franciscan Houses, thus ended, not unnaturally, in the defeat of the weaker rival, at Ware. Now a famous poem by Jack Upland, the Lollard, of about the same date, makes mention of precisely this kind of jealousy between friary and friary:—

"Why heire you to ferm your limitours,
giving there fore each yeare a certain rent
and will not suffer one in another's limitation,
right as yee were your selves, lords of countries?"³⁸

—he asks. Viewed in this light, then, the incident between Ware and Cambridge assumes historical proportions. For it gives evidence, orthodox and unimpeachable, in support of one more accusation levelled by

³⁷ *Cal. Pap. Lett.*, iv., p. 517. The Cambridge Ho. was on the site of the present Sidney Sussex Coll.

³⁸ *Pol. Poems*, as before, pp. 20-21.

heretical followers of Wycliff at the Religious of their day.

Another familiar complaint against the Mendicants, this time as much from the secular clergy as from the Lollard, was that, by attracting the rich gifts and legacies of the dying to themselves, the friars were continually robbing the parish churches and priests of their rightful offerings. Jack Upland himself, again, notices their partiality for the wealthy on this score :—

“ Freer, what charite is this to prease upon a rich man, and to intice him to be buried among you, from his parish church, and to such rich men give letters of fraternite confirmed by your generall seale, and thereby to bear him in hand, that he shal have part of all your masses, mattens, preachings, fastings, wakings, and all other good deeds done by your brethren of your order, both whilest he liveth, and after that he is dead? . . . And yet a poore man, that ye wite well or supposen in certen to have no good of, ye ne given to such letters, though he be a better man to God than such a rich man.”³⁹

Whether the inmates of Ware Friary were ever accused of such practices we do not know. Certain it is that the convent received in its day a share of lay burials and lay bequests. John Weever testifies, as late as the year 1631, that “at the North end of this town was a Frierie, whose ruines not altogether beaten downe are to be seen at this day. . . Here lieth Thomas Heton and Jone his wife, which Thomas died xixth Aug., 1409, and Joyce . . . William Littlebury, and Elizabeth his wife; he died xxii of July, 14 . . .”⁴⁰ A perusal of such abstracts of Wills as have been printed from the Register of Archdeacon Stoneham of St. Albans⁴¹ reveals that our city ancestors were not unmindful on their death-beds of the potency of Franciscans’ intercessions at Ware for the souls in purgatory. Nine separate bequests “to the brethren of Ware” are to be found, with the exception of one slightly earlier and one later, between the years 1431 and 1438. If we compare them, however, with others, more numerous, to the Carmelites of Hitchin or the Dominicans of Dunstable, for example, we are still left with an impression of the relative obscurity of our little

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁴⁰ *Anc. Monums.*, p. 312.

⁴¹ In *Herts Genealog. and Antiq.*, vols. i., ii. and iii. For references to other Wills and bequests elsewhere see *Vict. Co. Hist. of Hertf.*, vol. iii., as before.

Franciscan House. Nevertheless, it is good to know that Joan Walsche, as she lies dying at "St. Stephen's without the town" in the year 1435, does not forget these needy sons of the Poverello, nor again Thomas London, Walter Hickman, Almaric Weste, merchants of St. Albans, soon to be buried under the greensward in St. Peter's churchyard.

One Obit remains to-day among the Charters of the British Museum to tell the tale of annual masses said for the departed at the friary of Ware. Of the gifts that came with it there is no record. Since it has not been printed as yet from the original document, a transcription is here furnished in full. Its contemporary mention of "the conventuall cherche of freeres yn Ware" is probably unique:—

"Thys indenture made the iiiiith day of October, yn the xvii^{3ere} of the reyne of Kyng Henry the viiiith be twene freer Paule, warden of the gray freeres yn Ware, and the convente⁴² of the same place off the on parte—and Thomas Hyde of the other partye, for dyverse causys, consyderacyons, and covenantes here after folowyng, by the fore namyd warden and covente and there successores truly to be performyd and fulfilled;— that ys to say the fore namyd warden and covent by thur one assente and consente, with the assente and agremente of Rychard Brynkeley, thur mynster, by thes presentes, covenanthe and graunthe to and with the fore namyd Thomas Hyde, that the sayde warden and hys successores with thur holle covente byndyth them selfe perpetually that who so ever schall syng the seconde masse by fore the common autore⁴³ onyse yn the wek, that ys to say the thyrday, shall specyally pray for the good estate and prosperus welfare of the forsayd Thomas Hyde and Jone hys wyfe, duryng ther lyvys, and for thur sowlys after they be departyd thys world, and for the sowlys of John Hyde, and Maryon hys wyfe, father and mother to the forsayde Thomas, and for the sowle of Elyzabeth and Helyn sumtyme wyvys to the forsayd Thomas, and for alle the fryndes and benefactores of the forsayd Thomas :

Also farthermore, the same warden and covente with thur on assente and consente, by thes presentes, covenanthe and graunthe with the same Thomas Hyde, that the sayde warden and hys successores with the hoole covente shall kepe perpetually onnys yn the 3ere after the date here of, with yn the conventuall cherche of freeres yn Ware, a soleme and a dewothe^{43a} obyte for the sayde Thomas Hyde and the sowlys before rehersyd, at suche day and tyme as here after ys expressyd,

⁴² =convent (cf. Covent Garden).

⁴³ =altar.

^{43a} =devout.

that ys to say, the Sondag immediatly folowyng Estur Day callyd *Dominica in Albis*, a soleme Dyrige,⁴⁴ and, the nexte day folowyng, mass of requiem by noote.⁴⁵ And ferthermore the sayde warden and covente covenanthe and graunthe that the same warden and hys successors shall ȝerely ii thymys yn the ȝere perpetually rede or cawse to be redde this presente indenture yn the chaptur howse afore all the covente, that ys to say, *in quindena Omnium Sanctorum, et in quindena Pasche*, to the yntente that the sayd Obbyte with other the premyssys truly may be observyd and kepte acordyng to the agremente and covenante afore expressyd, with owte pretending of ony ygnorancy yn the same. In wytnesse wherof to the on parte of these yndentures with the sayde Thomas Hyde remaynyng, the sayd warden and covente have sette too ther covente sealle, and to the other parte of these yndentures with the same warden and covente remaynyng, the sayde Thomas Hyde have sette to hys sealle, and for a confirmacyon and more surety of the premyssys, the fore namyd Rychard Brynkeley, mynyster of Yngla[n]d, have sette hys sealle, gevyn the day and ȝere above wrytyn."⁴⁶

The impression of the convent seal attached to this document, though imperfect, seems distinctly superior to one which has provided a cast for the modern photographers.⁴⁷ The kneeling figure of Lord Wake, the founder, with his arms emblazoned upon his shield, is unmistakable. But the central figure which he adores has been erroneously described as representing Christ Crucified. The out-stretched wing is itself sufficient with the general posture of the body to identify it with the Seraph of St. Francis' famous vision on Mount Alverna, during which he was said to have received the Stigmata :—

“ He saw in a vision of God a man like a seraph, having six wings, standing over him with hands outstretched and feet joined together, fixed to a cross. Two wings were raised above his head, two were spread out for flight, and two veiled the whole body.”⁴⁸

It is the present writer's belief that a careful examination of the original seal will convince his readers further

⁴⁴ =Dirige, (*Dirige* and *Placebo*), the office for the Dead, (so named from the opening Latin word of the Psalm), from which we get our word *dirge*.

⁴⁵ i.e., of course, with music.

⁴⁶ Add. Charter 36070.

⁴⁷ Mr. William Page tells me that the photograph reproduced in the *Vict. County Hist.*, vol. iii., was made from a grey cast specially prepared for the purpose, (in this case apparently from B.M. Seal lxiv., 73). The description criticised in the text is that given in the vol. mentioned, (iii., p. 451).

⁴⁸ Celano, *Vita* 1, cap. iii., (trans. Ferrers-Howell, *Lives of St. Francis*, p. 92).



THE SEAL OF WARE FRIARY.
(BELOW, ADE CHARTER 36070 WITH THE OBIT).

that the figure kneeling opposite to that of the Founder is not the Lady Blanche,⁴⁹ but St. Francis himself. Even the rays of light which stream from the Seraph's stigmata to those of the Saint can be traced here, as in other representations of the scene.⁵⁰ Moreover the hooded friar below would be praying the more appropriately in *his* direction, not in hers. Richard Brinkley, the Minister Provincial mentioned in our charter, deserves to be remembered as one who, in days when the friars were notorious for their opposition to the New Learning, was to be found studying Greek manuscripts from the conventual Library at Oxford.⁵¹

The final references to our friary have all a tragic sadness about them. Thither in 1430 came Roger Donwe, Dewe, or Daw, "Doctor of Oxford," thirty-fifth Minister Provincial of the Order in England, to end his days, "for just causes deposed by the Minister General."⁵² What they were we are not told. To put the matter crudely, the Franciscan authorities probably were inclined to look upon Ware as a convenient place in which to deposit the unwanted. Obscure though the convent might be, however, at least one of its Wardens was the confidant and adviser of a nobleman of some importance. Lord Hussey was one of those unfortunates who fell under the suspicion of Henry VIII., through failing to lend his aid in suppressing the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1537. Convicted, sentenced to be executed at Tyburn, and despairing of pardon he writes to the King to make settlement of his debts and duties in view of the impending forfeiture. In this letter, now among the Hussey Papers, he mentions how—"I spake with the Warden of Gray Freers at Ware" for his help in the business in hand. The Warden's letter replies, "with commendations to him and to my lady." He has made the arrangement required, and adds a note concerning

⁴⁹ Although she certainly seems to have made her own bequest to the friars, after her husband's death. (Note too on the seal espec. the changed position of the hands, and the hood at the neck).

⁵⁰ cf. Matthew Paris' own drawing in MS. C.C.C., Camb., xvi., fol. 66, of particular interest for our present study; (reproduced [pl. ii.], and described [pp. 2-3] in *Collect Franc.*, [B.S.F. St.] I., by Mr. Little).

⁵¹ (He was a Cambridge graduate). See Little, *Oxf. Grey Friars*, pp. 113 and 283.

⁵² (Elected Min. Prov. in 1427 or '8; buried at Ware). See *ibid.*, p. 259; and Kingsford, *Greyfriars of London*, p. 194.

something calculated, no doubt, to soothe the last anxiety of his friend in matters more solemn than any temporal affairs :—

“ Where I promised you a fair bible you shall have it. I thought some of your servants should have been with me ere now. After Easter I will deliver it to Percival your servant.”⁵³

As the hour of Dissolution advances the clouds gather rapidly about the House, and its inmates. On the 5th of May, 1534, in common with “ the convents of Friars Preachers⁵⁴ at Langley Regis, the Minors of Alisbury, the Preachers of Dunstable, the Minors of Bedford, and the Carmelites of Hechynges,”⁵⁵ the friars of Ware in their own chapter-house, under the signature of Thomas Chapman, S.T.B.,⁵⁶ their Warden, had made “ Declaration of Obedience to Henry VIII. and Queen Anne, and of the lawfulness of their marriage, with repudiation of the Bishop of Rome’s authority, and acknowledgment of the King as Supreme Head of the Church.”⁵⁷ But this act of subserviency was not to save them. On the 25th of September, 1538, John Hilsey, Bishop of Rochester, writes to Thomas Cromwell from Bury in Suffolk.⁵⁸ He has been at Babwell, a house of Greyfriars in the district, and communed with the warden to know whether he would surrender if the King sent to him. The warden desired Hilsey to receive his humble submission, and said he was ready to surrender if the King and Cromwell wish. Hilsey now offers to take the surrender on his return from Lynn. He has commanded warden and brethren not to diminish or alienate any of the stuff. Now he asks Cromwell to put the name of Babwell in his letter, and, if he inserts Thetford, *and Ware also*, which are in his way homeward, will bring the surrender of them.⁵⁹ Two days later he writes again,—from Thetford :—

“ Came to Thetford on September 26th, on his way to Lynn. Found the place of the Black Friars without a head, with all

⁵³ See *Letters and Papers of Hen. VIII.*, vol. xii., pt. ii., no. 187.

⁵⁴ i.e. the Dominicans, of course, (at King’s Langley, in Herts).

⁵⁵ = Hitchin.

⁵⁶ He seems to have been buried at the London Ho. (see Kingsford, *Greyf. of London*, p. 131).

⁵⁷ *Lett. and Pap. Hen. VIII.*, vol. vii., no. 665.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. xiii., pt. ii., no. 437.

⁵⁹ He adds that there is at Babwell a bedridden friar who shall be used as Cromwell shall command.

the doors shut for the safeguard of the stuff, for the people were ready to snatch and spoil. Found the Austin Friars so bare that there was no earthly thing at all, but trash and baggage."

When the blow falls it is almost everywhere a tale of wretched poverty, and dwindling numbers. Richard, Bishop of Dover, not Hilsey, was destined "to receive to the King's use," as he puts it, "the Black Friars of Dunstable, the Grey in Ware," and seventeen other friaries, a month or two later. Most of the substance, he says, was sold, stolen, or pledged, before his coming, and little left either in plate, lead or implements. Yet he has so ordered that both plate and lead have come to light. The crafty old fox asks Cromwell for the Dominican House at King's Langley for himself, with the profits, during his lifetime. It is the pick of the bunch, no doubt. If he knows Cromwell's pleasure about certain future plans—"all the lead shall be in slabs in Christmas time."⁶⁰ Thus ends the story of our little friary, as unobtrusively as it began, by callous men of the world now estimated as worth "29/8d. a year"⁶¹ What happened to the brethren dispersed, turned adrift into this same unkind world? We can only guess. One or two may have obtained benefices. Others, we may be sure, went to swell the ranks of "the sturdy beggars," those tragic ghosts of history hovering behind our modern army of unemployed. For friars, unlike the monks, apparently received no pension. Of the architectural remains left standing, practically all that can be seen to-day are some fragments of the cloister, a few windows and buttresses, and the shell of a hall, its fine open timber roof concealed by modern plaster and partitions, with the exception of one king-post standing forlornly in an attic.⁶²

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 1021.

⁶¹ *Mins. Accts., Hen. VIII.*, no. 1617.

⁶² A complete and thoroughly readable description (with photograph of ext.) will be found in the Royal Commission's *Invent. of Hist. Monst. in Hertf.*, p. 228. The friary buildings now house the local Town Council, and the gardens are open to the public. Chauncy declared that here was the *Benedictine* Priory of Ware (vol. ii., p. 251). However, Dawes in his *Records of Ware* (Hertford, 1891) denies this, claiming the site for the Franciscans, and relegating the Benedictines to the "extreme north of the town," where "even now portions of old masonry may be seen in a building near Baldock Street which are presumably remnants of this institution" (p. 14). Dr. Messenger, who has kindly looked into the matter for me, writes: "The only thing certain is that there were two religious houses, and that the Priory is the remains of one of them." To my mind the obvious reference to the proximity of the River Lea, as given here on page 8, is *decisively* in favour of Mr. Dawes' account. The Ryl. Commission's Report seems to entertain no doubt of its accuracy.

When every available record has been exhausted, how very little do we know, after all, of the daily life and activities of these Hertfordshire Greyfriars? Dissolution, which swept the many Houses away, seems to have destroyed well-nigh all the documents. To obtain a picture of typical Franciscan conventual life it is necessary to have recourse to some such work as the *Speculum Disciplinæ* of brother Bernard of Besse.⁶³ Although written by an Italian friar towards the end of the thirteenth century, brother Bernard's Book of Discipline can be considered representative of Franciscan habit over a wide area and epoch. Indeed, in his *Liber de Laudibus*, Bernard himself, secretary to the famous "Seraphic Doctor" St. Bonaventura, gives several reminiscences of English friars, and is almost the first to tell us anything of brother William, Matthew Paris' hero. Much that is amusing, in addition to what is often most laudable and always extraordinarily intimate and illuminating, appears in the first-mentioned treatise. Here are elaborate Rules for conduct in the church, in the refectory, in the dormitory, rules for the chanting of the services, and the care of sacred vessels, rules for the correct style and wearing of the Franciscan garments, rules for intercourse with superiors and equals, for manual labour, for behaviour in the outside world—"where walls ever have ears"—and a hundred other picturesque details. "Concerning discipline in eating," for example, your friar is carefully reminded to hold his cup with two hands when drinking, and avoid that shaking of members and tumult of breathing or of lips, which denote lack of self-control. Keep your eyes on your own plate, he is told, and do not babble at meal-times,—*especially* with your mouth full! Be not fussy about your food, bringing in your own private supply with you into the frater, or fishing for the daintiest morsels in the common dish "with naked fingers, instead of a spoon." When you sneeze or cough, remember to turn away from the table. Be careful not to litter it with the fragments of your repast, or grab rudely for the dish as it comes your way, sprawling over the board, and perchance

⁶³ The Latin text here used is that of the Quaracchi edition of 1898, in *Sei. Scripta S. Bonaventuræ*. The work has not been published as yet in an English translation.

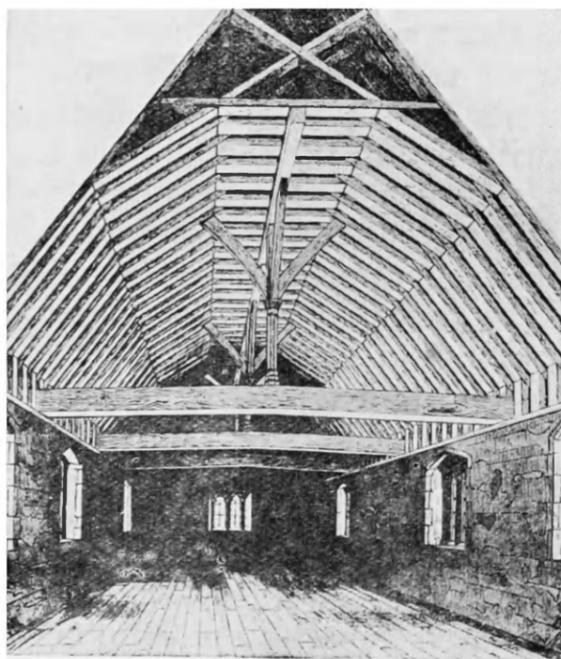
dipping the sleeve of your tunic in another brother's meat. Don't blow on your food! Don't wipe your knife, your hand, *or* your teeth on the table-cloth, but use a napkin. Eat leisurely, and remember when tempted to take nourishment, or imbibe, at odd times between meals, that only children and animals take more than *two* meals in the day! Don't bring in pets, your tame rats, or birds, to dine with you in hall. The refectory is not for them. Shun drinking of "healths," put water in your wine, and ever avoid intemperance in all things.

Equally quaint and vivid are the elaborate warnings against bad manners in church. Your friar is not to create disorder in the worship by such aggressive actions as rapping the desk with his hand when the singers go out of tune, or rushing forward to read the lessons unbidden. He is not to laugh aloud, whisper with his neighbours, or make secret signs to his friends across the way, in the opposite stalls, with "wagging of the head, rolling of the eyes, contraction of the nose, protruding of the lips," and so forth. Let him be reverent, not going to sleep in his stall or running about the church while service is on, trimming lamps, killing insects, or visiting a fellow friar on some frivolous errand. Rubbing of hands, idle turning of leaves, spitting, chatting, slamming of seats, all will disturb the sacred offices. Even more humorous are the specific directions given—not to push up your misericord ledge with your foot instead of your hand to the distraction of worshippers, as in a characteristic fit of *accidia* perhaps; nor to strike strange attitudes in your seat, lolling or "gyrating" about, sticking out legs to annoy the brother in front in his sub-stall, or gazing around you—"like a stag in a glade, or a rustic at the play." When we learn that the Greyfriars of even so exalted a House as that at Oxford were recruited mainly from the tradesmen, artisans, and villeins of a none too decorous age, it is easy to understand the force of brother Bernard's ceaseless prohibitions. The Friar came like the monk with all his imperfections, all his naïve human nature, into the holy place. It was the Gothic Revival of an "elegant" Victorian age that gave us our silly notions about a serene elegance in the cloister.

Looking back over the fragmentary little story of Fran-

ciscan endeavour in this county we shall choose naturally to dwell rather upon the golden age of the thirteenth century, than upon subsequent failures, obscurities, excesses, in thus commemorating the beginnings of so praiseworthy a movement. As for its first fruitful zeal and later sterility, what human organisation has escaped the experience? With all their little weaknesses, of none may the famous words be said more truly than of great men of the Order of St. Francis in England:—

“Men renowned for their power, giving counsel by their understanding, and declaring prophecies: leaders of the people by their counsels, and by their knowledge of learning meet for the people, wise and eloquent in their instructions. . . . There be of them that have left a name behind them, that their praises might be reported. And some there be which have no memorial, who are perished as though they had never been. . . . But these were merciful men whose righteousness hath not been forgotten. . . . Their seed shall remain for ever, and their glory shall not be blotted out. Their bodies are buried in peace, but their name liveth for evermore. The people will tell of their wisdom, and the congregation will shew forth their praise.”



A RECONSTRUCTION OF THE HALL INTERIOR,
WARE FRIARY.

[The writer's thanks are due to Mr. A. G. Little, F.B.A., and Father E. C. Messenger, for information sent as here recorded in the notes; also to Mr. Robt. T. Andrews, Hon. Treas. of the East Herts Archæological Society, for the kind loan of the Society's lantern-slide from which the above illustration is taken.]