

# BLACKFRIARS

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## EDITORIAL

WE wish especially to recommend to our readers a valuable article in the September number of the *Burlington Magazine* (pp. 99-100). The article is concerned with a retable now in the church of Thornham Parva in Suffolk, which has only recently been restored to a public church. For some years it had lain unnoticed and unvalued in a private house. Previously to that it had been for a little while in the possession of a Catholic yeoman-farmer, who, however, had not inherited it, but bought it at an auction.

The point of interest for our readers will lie in the fact that the retable was evidently painted for a Dominican East Anglian church. There were half a dozen of them in Norfolk and Suffolk. That the painting was intended for one of these priories seems proved by the figure of St. Edmund that appears in it. This is St. Edmund, king and martyr: his arrow is put daintily in his hand as though it were a sceptre or a flower. At each end of the retable—the centre of it carries an exquisite crucifixion—is a Dominican saint, St. Dominic at one end, at the other St. Peter Martyr. These are accurately habited; in the hands of each is a long preaching cross. Perhaps this symbol is less rare than we think it to be. Certainly in the seal of the Dominican Priory of Great Yarmouth St. Dominic is so represented. We have seen other Dominican Saints also thus depicted. One such is in the refectory of the present Domi-

nican Priory in London: it seems there, but surely is not, an archiepiscopal cross.

The Rev. W. W. Lillie, who writes the article in the *Burlington*, describes the retable with knowledge and gracefulness. He dates it between 1300 and 1320; he considers it of English provenance. Only slowly are the treasures of English medieval art being amassed. This is one of the most spiritual of any that have been discovered: it is also one of the most spirited, most natural, most tender, and most gay. The tenderness of the embrace of Christ and his mother on the Cross, the shy affection of the young St. John, the strength of St. Peter, the energy of the flaming St. Paul, the austere yet happy-loving Baptist, the dainty posturing of St. Edmund, the noble figures of St. Margaret and St. Catherine of Alexandria, the restrained lines of St. Dominic, the more vehement enthusiasm of St. Peter Martyr are all gathered into a strange unity of design and composition, which is in part the effect of a splendour of colour grouped within the white and black of the extreme end figures, and in part the effect of the wholly massive but decorative frame. Its flowers, fruits, and foliage suggest the countryside, English or any other, where rains are frequent and nature rich and full.

Its reproduction—though without colour—is worth the purchase money of the *Burlington*: the article that accompanies it helps to piece out the glorious colouring the retable must show in itself.

Not in the same style but with the same religious inspiration our own age is now at last capable again of producing such a masterpiece. May this lovely re-discovery prove a noble incentive to our eager artists to reach out to visions as authentic, as convincing, and as true!