DOMINICAN FOOTPRINTS IN SCANDINAVIA

BETWEEN Stockholm and Upsala, in one of the occasional clearances amongst Sweden's seemingly eternal forests towards the northern end of the great Lake Mälar, lies the lovely village of Sigtuna, the cradle of the Dominican Order in all Scandinavia where, at the time of the Reformation, the Dominican Province (*Provincia Daciae*) counted forty-three houses of friars and four of nuns. It is, beyond question, one of the most interesting places historically in northern Europe. In this small settlement three massive ecclesiastical stone-built ruins attract attention, the broken tower of the Church of Saint Lawrence and the fortress-like churches of Saint Olaf and of Saint Peter with their chancels roofless but otherwise intact. The last-mentioned church was the cathedral of the bishopric of Sigtuna which early in the twelfth century was split into two dioceses, Weteraos and Upsala.

But if these three ancient relics of Sweden's early and vigorous Catholicity call for notice, another in Sigtuna commands it. The church of St. Mary, as it is called, is a building of clamorous pink brick, looking scarce more than a decade of years old when viewed from a short distance. When, however, we get close up to it, it shows by the lines of its door and window arches signs of considerable age, and the interior clearly demonstrates its birth in the thirteenth century. It is no other, in fact, than the ancient Dominican Church of Sigtuna, now used as the state or Lutheran place of worship. This explains its intense state of preservation. The altar has a fine mediæval retro-altar or reredos, and round the church are placed some of the original statues possessed by the friars, one of them being a splendid one of Saint Dominic in painted wood, five-feet high. The saint is depicted wearing the high cap so necessary for keeping the head warm in these northern atmospheres, but it so closely resembles the well-known doctor's cap of Saint Thomas Aquinas that for a moment we forget the cold and attribute

the head-gear to mediæval admiration for Our Holy Father's great intellectual gifts. Historically the church is famous as the burial place of Sweden's greatest archbishop, Jarler, O.P., who ruled from 1235 to 1255. He it was who put the Swedish Church on a firm footing by enforcing the law of celibacy, setting up cathedral chapters, and withdrawing the bishops from state domination. Probably it was he also who settled the liturgy for the Swedish Church, for otherwise it is difficult to account for the very marked Dominican influence in the rite, an influence that went as far as introducing the name of Saint Dominic into the *Confiteor* of the Swedish missal. Jarler's tomb, in the north wall of the sanctuary, is an altar tomb without any effigy; and the ancient inscription has been restored.

The coming of the Dominicans to Sigtuna was extraordinarily early in the history of the Order. A document is still extant in which Pope Honorius III, on January 19th, 1221, granted twenty days of indulgence to all the faithful of Sweden who should assist the Friars Preachers of Sigtuna to erect their church and convent. This was more than eight months before the Friars arrived in England. But quite probably the bull was issued before the Dominicans had actually settled in Sigtuna. It may have been rather a provisionary brief granted in answer to the prayers of Geoffrey, provost of the Church of Saint Peter (the former cathedral of Sigtuna), who had met Saint Dominic at Bologna in 1219 and had petitioned him for a band of his missionary sons for the far north. In point of fact Geoffrey had anticipated, mistakenly it proved, the consent of his Archbishop, Olaf Bastommer of Upsala, and when the friars arrived they were summarily bidden to betake themselves elsewhere. They sought and found a home in the little town of Skokloster, where they peacefully waited for better days. Time, however, had a strange revenge in store, for on the death of the anti-Dominican Olaf one of the friars he had exiled succeeded him on the Upsala throne. This was Archbishop Jarler, already mentioned, who brought back his brethren to their first home in 1237. Here they set up their great

convent, of which there are now but few remains, except the church already described. All the buildings seem to have been completed by the year 1252, the year which saw the burial of Jarler amongst his brethren. Cardinal William of Sabina, the papal legate, and the bishops of other dioceses promised indulgences to benefactors of their foundation. One of the altars was reserved as the shrine for a large relic of the True Cross and on every Friday of the year a special Mass was offered there, whilst to those attending the Archbishop of Upsala in 1298 granted ten days of indulgence.

Jarler was the first of four Friars Preachers to rule at Upsala. In 1281 John Adolfsson, Bishop of Abo in Finland, was transferred to the metropolitan see where he died in 1285. In 1290 Friar John, a Sigtuna man by birth and prior there, was elected Archbishop, but survived his consecration only one year. He left behind him a reputation for great sanctity. The last Dominican Archbishop of Upsala was also prior of Sigtuna. This was Peter Philippson, who became prior in 1325 and shortly afterwards provincial, a post he was occupying when in 1332 the Holy See appointed him Archbishop. He died in 1341 and, like his predecessors Jarler and John, was buried in his former convent home. One of his contemporaries, and his predecessor in the priorship of Sigtuna, was Israel Erlandsson who, in 1309 was appointed to the neighbouring see of Westeraos, which he administered until his death in 1332. In 1327 he obtained as coadjutor, Friar Egislaus Berghersson, perhaps also of Sigtuna priory, who ruled Westeraos until 1352. Probably, like Bishop Erlandsson, he was buried in the priory church. He may however have been a member of the Westeraos community, for a convent had been established there as far back as 1244. Sigtuna was always regarded as the principal house in Sweden and was the residence of the Vicar-Provincial; the latter official governed the Swedish friars under the supervision of the Provincial of Dacia whose jurisdiction extended over Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland. It seems probable that the Provincial resided as a rule in one of the Danish

houses, and ruled the other countries vicariously, in much the same way that at this epoch the English Provincial governed Scotland and Ireland. Not infrequently the Prior of Sigtuna combined the office of Vicar-Provincial and Conventual Prior. Whenever a Swede was elected Provincial he seems to have resided at Sigtuna, as in the cases of Peter Philippson about 1330 and Matthias Olafsson in 1510.

Sigtuna was a large house that, as late as 1461, possessed a community of thirty-seven friars, and, it remained during its three centuries of existence a stronghold of apostolic work; but its end came shortly before the year 1530. Intent on our own history of the reformation and its vandalism and worse, we are apt to forget that separation from the rest of Christendom, and bitter persecution, overtook Sweden eight or nine years before it came to England. Gustavus Wasa, physically and morally as gross as Henry VIII and equally a tyrant, publicly executed the Archbishop-elect of Upsala, Magnus Canute, and the Bishop of Westeraos, Peter Jakobson, in 1527, on the same specious charge of treason that Henry laid to the charge of the Cardinal Bishop of Rochester, Saint John Fisher, eight years later. Archbishop Canute and Bishop Jakobson were placed upon half-starved horses, with their faces towards the tails, the Archbishop wearing a mitre of rough bark and the Bishop one of straw. After their death on the gallows their holy remains were savagely torn on the wheel and then thrown into the city ditch to be devoured by carrion-birds and vermin. The same year the brutal and covetous Wasa forced the Diet to grant him the property of all bishoprics and monastic settlements, but for a time the great priory of Sigtuna was spared. The king, like Henry VIII ten years later, pretended that it would be advantageous to religion if the smaller Dominican houses were suppressed and their inhabitants sent to keep the rule at Sigtuna. A year or two later he seized Sigtuna also, thus completing the ruin of the fifteen Dominican priories of Sweden.

Less than an hour's journey from Sigtuna, through the same forest and waterland, brings us to Upsala, still on the

ubiquitous Lake Mälar. The ancient royal castle dominates the city but is rivalled by the enormous cathedral, the shrine of Eric, saint and king. If the pink brick of the old Dominican church at Sigtuna can best be described as clamorous then no word is left to describe what the "restorers" have done to the exterior of a cathedral which in its structure is one of the most beautiful churches, as it is also the largest, in the north of the world. The interior decoration, however, is more reassuring and we can imagine something of the ancient glory of the Church when it was the cathedral of the Catholic archbishops of whom so many were, as we have said, sons of Saint Dominic. Dating from the second half of the thirteenth century, it is of French architecture with the characteristically high nave and side aisles surmounted by an abundance of flying buttresses. The cathedral suffered much in the many fires which were formerly so frequent a feature in Scandinavian towns, built as they were almost entirely of wood. The most disastrous one in Upsala occurred in 1703 and left much of the cathedral a ruin until its complete but perhaps not entirely satisfactory restoration in 1893. Unlike the other great churches of Scandinavia which are of Romanesque architecture (which in England we call Norman), Upsala cathedral is gothic throughout and is very reminiscent of the typical French cathedrals, whereas Trondhjem and Hamar in Norway, and Kirkwall in the Orkneys remind us strongly of Durham and Carlisle.

To Catholics the most interesting feature in the cathedral is the shrine of Saint Eric, king and martyr, slain in battle for the Faith in 1160. The shrine is still intact and lies at the back of the high altar. Here can always be seen hanging the wreath brought each year on May 18th, the anniversary of his death, by the Catholics of Sweden. Nearby is the tomb of the destroyer of Catholic Sweden, the unpleasant Gustavus Wasa. The life of Saint Eric and an account of his miracles was written by the Dominican prior of Sigtuna, Israel Erlandsson whom we have already said became Bishop of Westeraos in 1309. He wrote it, he tells us, at

the request of the canons of Upsala when the see was vacant; a statement that points to the year 1305 when Archbishop Nils Allesson died, because Israel began to write it as prior of Sigtuna, therefore before 1309. He evidently did not finish it until after he became bishop, for he mentions a miracle of the year 1411. Some of the miracles that Friar Israel relates were from his own personal experience. When he was a student at Lincoping he suffered a long time from a quartan ague—we call it malaria to-day—and he told his troubles to his uncle Fulk the archdeacon, and, later, Archbishop of Upsala from 1274 to 1277. His uncle advised him to go to Saint Eric's tomb and pray for a cure. He did so, and his prayer was answered. Another story of Saint Eric's powerful intercession relates to a storm-bound party of Dominicans, with Peter the Prior-Provincial at their head, who were returning, in the autumn of 1303, to the convent of Skara from the convent of Skenning where they had been holding the annual Provincial Chapter. Their journey lay across Lake Wetter, but the storm prevented their setting sail, and they had to remain as guests of the Cistercians at Alvastrum(?), unwilling guests or unwelcome we cannot say; but it would seem that they fell into one of these two categories, for the writer tells us they prayed with such earnestness to Saint Eric that the tempest immediately abated, the waves smoothed themselves out and they were able to reach Scara without difficulty.

A visit to the remains of the Dominican houses in the south of Sweden, Lund (A.D. 1222), Kalmar (1245), Halmstad (1264), Skenninge (1237), and others less known, would require another journey than the one we are tracing, but mention must be made of the ancient convent at Wisby in the large island of Gothland, where much of the church is still preserved, because of its association with the English Dominicans who first made the settlement here. Tradition has it that the first friars came here from Oxford, having been sent by Gilbert de Fresney, founder of the English Province, first Prior of Oxford and first Provincial. The house dates from the year 1227. Some of the houses in

southern Sweden owe their origin to Saint Hyacinth, apostle of Poland, Russia, Prussia, Livonia and eastern Scandinavia. It is a great pity that this saint, one of the chief glories of the Dominican Order, should be so little known in England.

At Stockholm we have an opportunity of seeing the ruins of the Dominican priory founded here in 1336, the last house to be erected in Sweden. It is very near to the royal palace and the church of Saint Nicholas, in front of which stands the statue of the apostle of Swedish Protestantism, Olaf Peterson. The indescribable look of pride on his face has to be seen to be believed; the marvel is that the stone of which the statue is made has not disintegrated from swollen conceit. But the Dominican interest in Stockholm is happily no longer confined to the past, for in 1931 the French Dominicans, who had already opened a house in Oslo ten years earlier, made a new settlement in Stockholm in a house next to the convent of the Dominican Sisters of the Third Order, who have been here for a number of years. The present community consists of three Fathers and one lay-brother, and they administer a parish extending for many miles; but the Catholics in the whole of Sweden do not exceed four thousand and consequently the Stockholm Dominicans have numerically a very small congregation to serve. There is however abundant hope for the future although the Catholic Church is not so free as in Norway, where in Oslo, the Fathers, four in number, have built a beautiful and spacious church on the front of one of the main streets, Neuberggaten, an action not yet contemplated in Stockholm where the churches are down entries or courts as in England a hundred years ago. Not a quarter of a mile distant is a convent of Dominican Sisters who greatly assist the Fathers in their apostolic work. Near the centre of the city can be seen the ruins of the old Dominican priory and church, but only a few inches of wall appear above the ground. The city corporation have, however, ably cleared the site so that the ground-plan of the whole convent and of the two churches, one parochial, the other

conventual, can easily be traced. The friars came here early in the thirteenth century and worked strenuously until the total destruction of Catholicism in the years between 1523 and 1540. In 1352 a Dominican, Siffrid of Lincoping, Bishop of Stavanger, was translated to the see of Oslo, where he died in 1358. The reformation, as in Sweden, came to Norway long before it came to England, and there is no reason to doubt that Henry VIII was emboldened to break away from the union of Christendom by the example of the northern tyrants. Norway, despite herself, was separated from Rome because of her dependence on, or rather subjection to, the Danish king, Christian II. This man introduced Protestantism almost as soon as the first heretical teachings had issued from Luther's mouth, for like the Protestant princes of Germany he saw a golden opportunity of grasping the goods of the Church. His crimes however brought about his deposition in 1523, but his successor Frederic I completed the destruction begun and by 1540 the wreck of religion in both Denmark and Norway was complete. The principal pre-reformation Norwegian priory was that of Trondhjem, the metropolitan city, and according to tradition the settlement, like that of Wisby, was made by English Dominicans. Here the great German Dominican theologian, Henry Kalteisen, was archbishop from 1452 to 1459. Trondhjem's great cathedral is too well known to be described here. Hamar, an ancient cathedral city, about 60 miles north of Oslo, also had a Dominican priory, dedicated to Saint Olaf, but its ruins now lie under the encroaching waters of the enormous Lake Mjössen. Much of the cathedral still remains, open to the skies, but with the walls of the nave and their bold arches still standing, looming over the shores of the vast lake. In 1253 a Dominican named Peter held the see of Hamar, and another Friar Preacher, Martin Slangesthorp ruled it from 1364 until his death in 1380. The Dominicans returned to Hamar a few years ago and the town is the residence of the Vicar-Provincial of the French Dominicans, whose mission in Scandinavia now represents the ancient Province of Dacia.

The fourth Dominican house in Norway was in the great Hanseatic town of Bergen, which formerly could only be reached from Oslo by sea, but now the traveller can do the journey by one of the most wonderful railroads in the world. He can leave Oslo in summer heat—it can be very hot in Oslo during July and August—and in five hours' time be in the depths of winter, passing through great snow drifts, and by frozen lakes, at an altitude of nearly five thousand feet. Bergen provided a home for the Dominicans about the year 1230, but the house was destroyed early in the sixteenth century. Three friars governed the diocese of which Bergen was the cathedral city, Narfus from 1278 to 1304, Benedict Ringstad from 1370 to 1372, and Jacob Jonsson, who succeeded Benedict, ruled until 1401. Here in 1339 was buried John Haldorsson, O.P., "the most learned clerk that ever came out of Norway," He had been a professor in the universities of Paris and Bologna and seems to have been teaching theology in the priory of Trondhjem when in 1322 he was appointed by Rome to the see of Skalholt in south Iceland. Religion before the reformation was very flourishing in this northern land and the island was divided into two bishoprics, the northern one being at Holar. Skalholt was an important diocese with about five hundred priests and many churches, probably all of wood including the cathedral, of which there is now no trace. We get a glimpse of the difficulties under which the Icelanders lived from a curious record that in 1326 under John's episcopate no ship came to the country with wine and consequently no Mass could be celebrated. The bishop died in 1339, and, as we have said, was buried in the Dominican church at Bergen, there being no house of the Order in Iceland.

The direct way back to England is by boat from Bergen to Newcastle, where the considerable remains of the ancient Dominican priory and the splendid new one with its great church dedicated to Saint Dominic remind us of the long friendship between the two ancient Provinces of *Anglia* and *Dacia*.

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