Chronicle of the Grey Friars of London

Friars London Grey
Title: Chronicle of the Grey Friars of London

Author: Friars London Grey

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PREFACE.

The present Chronicle has hitherto remained not merely unpublished, but almost wholly unnoticed. It is now presented to the Camden Society in a full conviction of its value.

The Editor has given it the title of THE CHRONICLE OF THE GREY FRIARS OF LONDON: to, which it has an indisputable claim, inasmuch as it formed a portion of the Register-book of that fraternity. This title, however, must be taken merely as distinguishing the present compilation from others of the same class, and not as explanatory of its contents. In its original character it is not a religious but a civic Chronicle.

It is well known that history, in the form of Chronicles, was a favourite portion of the literature of the middle ages. The annals of a country were usually kept according to the years of the sovereign's power, and not those of the Christian æra. The Chronicles compiled in large cities were arranged in like manner, with the years reckoned according to the annual succession of chief magistrates. Thus, in the present instance, though the Chronicle is primarily arranged in reigns, and the years are numbered by those reigns, yet the period of time included in each year commences with the London mayoralty at the end of October, and the events which follow belong not only to the two ensuing months of that year of our Lord, but also to the next year until the end of October; and not only to that year of the king's reign, but to a portion more or less of the next year of the reign, according as the date of the
accession of the monarch varied from that of the Mayor's entrance into office.

The present compilation is therefore properly a London Chronicle; but the Editor deemed it unnecessary to copy from the manuscript the succession it contains of Mayors and Sheriffs, as their names have now been frequently printed elsewhere in other London Chronicles, and in fact in its earlier portions the manuscript consists of little else. Nor would the book have been worth printing at all in its original character of a London Chronicle, had it been nothing more; for in the early reigns its entries are slight and fragmentary, and occasionally incorrect, as some of the marginal notes will show.

It was usual for London Chronicles to commence with the reign of Richard the First, that being the date from which the roll of chief magistrates, at first termed Bailiffs, had been preserved. Such is the case with a Latin Chronicle kept in the Town Clerk's office, and which has been already presented to the Camden Society under the title of "Liber de Antiquis Legibus." Its narrative descends only to the year 1274. The French Chronicle of London, which has also been printed for the Camden Society, embraces the period from 1259 to 1343. The English Chronicle of London, which was edited by Sir Harris Nicolas, commences with the civic æra of 1189, the 1st Richard I. and extends to the year 1483. Some portions of it are highly curious. Arnold's Chronicle, like our own,

* Appended to Grafton's Chronicle will be found a table constructed for the express purpose of meeting the difficulties which arose from the mode of reckoning above described. It is entitled "A Table declaring the reigns of every King of this realm since the conquest, and the yeares of our Lord and monethes and dayes of their beginning, and also the names and surnames of all the Maiors and Sherifes of London, with the yere and daye of their entrance into their charge." For every year this table presents four dates: 1. the commencement of the year of our Lord, which was the 25th March; 2. that of the King's accession, as the case might be; 3. that of the entrance into office of the Bailiffs and Sheriffs, which was the 25th September; and 4. that of the entrance into office of the Mayor, the 25th October. It extends from A.D. 1159 to 1562.
is little more than a list of Mayors and Sheriffs: it commences at
the same period, and extends to 1520. Two other London Chronicles
still in manuscript are described in the annexed note. Besides
these, Fabyan’s printed Chronicle is to be classed as a London one.
His name concludes the list: for though Grafton, Holinshed, and
the indefatigable John Stowe, and others beside, may have been
Londoners, their books were general Chronicles, and not arranged
according to the succession of Mayors and Sheriffs.

Of all the foregoing, Arnold’s Chronicle is that which most nearly
resembles the present, detailing the same events, though not quite

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1. [In Latin.] Liber de Antiquis Legibus: extending from 1189 to 1274. Printed
for the Camden Society, 1840.

2. [In French.] The French Chronicle of London: from 1259 to 1343. Printed for
the Camden Society, 1844.

3. [In Latin.] The MS. Harl. 5444: from 1155 to 1216.

4. [In English.] The MS. Arundel XIX. in the College of Arms: from 1189 to
1451. It is prepared in blank to last to 1475, and there are some additions, but of little
importance, down to 1522. (See the preface to the French Chronicle of London, p. li.)

5. [In English.] The Chronicle of London, edited by Sir Harris Nicolas, in 4to. 1827,
from the MS. Harl. 565, and MS. Cotton Julius, B. i. extending from 1189 to 1482. —
Another MS., but with considerable variations, which was unknown to Sir Harris
Nicolas, is preserved in the MS. Cotton Cleopatra, C. iv, f. 21—61. It commences
with the expedition to Harleum in 1415, and terminates, like the MS. Harl. 565, in 1443.

6. A Tablet which hung at the tomb of the Duke of Lancaster in St. Paul’s cathedral,
contained a brief chronicle in Latin and English. See this printed in the same volume,
pp. 174—187, and from the same MS. It extends to the coronation of Henry VI. at
Paris in 1432.

7. Arnold’s Chronicle: from 1189 to 1509. The greater part of this book consists of
charters, bulls, ordinances, and formularies for legal documents. It was reprinted, under
the editorship of Dr. Dibdin, in 4to. 1811, with this title: "The Customs of London,
otherwise called Arnold’s Chronicle; containing, among divers other matters, the original
the additions included in the Second."

8. Fabyan’s Chronicle: from the earliest times to the year 1516; and continued in sub-
sequent editions to 1533, to 1542, and to 1559. Reprinted in 1811, 4to, edited by Sir
Henry Ellis.
so fully, down to the 17th Hen. VII. a.d. 1502. After that date, these two London Chronicles are wholly different in their contents.

Stowe had either the possession or the loan of the manuscript before us, and his small and compact hand is to be seen in two or three places in correction of the original writer. But we do not find that he made full use of it: of its passages relative to religious matters, which are the most curious of the whole, he has given but a small portion; and our Chronicle escaped the research of the equally industrious, and still more voluminous, ecclesiastical historian, the Rev. John Strype.

It is towards the end of the reign of Henry the Eighth that this Chronicle begins to have a character of its own. The writer had a watchful regard to the religious changes of the times, and he naturally recorded those in particular which occurred within the sphere of his personal observation, in the city of London, and in the metropolitan church of St. Paul. He appears to have retained possession of the book after the dissolution of the house of Grey Friars, and the dismissal of the rest of his fraternity; and from that time we may suppose that he continued his record in pursuance of his old habits, with no other object than his own satisfaction. It is therefore not to the Grey Friars as a body, or to the attention and accuracy of their successive registrars, that we have to attribute the chief historical value that exists in the following pages; but rather to the individual merit of him whom we may fairly regard as the last of the

* Stowe has written the word "false" against the passage stating the poisoning of King John in fol. 357 b. At the foot of fol. 348 is written in Stowe's hand:—

"John Brian slirve [see p. 14 of the present volume] was drowned by seint Katheryns myle. Reg. 6."*

Another of his corrections is described in the note at p. 15.

He names the "Reg. of the Gray Fryers" as his authority for the story of lady Hungerford. (Chronicle, ed. 1631, p. 317.)
London Franciscans. Beyond these circumstances, we have no
evidence upon which any speculations can be founded as to his name
or position. From his frequent notices of Saint Paul's it might be
surmised that he had some official connection with the cathedral
church; but the close vicinity of his residence would alone afford
him sufficient opportunities of observation.

With these brief remarks our Chronicle may be left to the just
appreciation of the reader. Some notice, however, is due to the
Fraternity in whose Register it was recorded. Though the Chronicle
itself contains but few and incidental items of their history, they were
by no means negligent of its due commemoration: but that was done
in another shape, and in the Latin language, in an earlier part of the
same volume. This Register is, in fact, one of the ampler authorities
for the history of the Friars Minors, as they once flourished in
England; and a descriptive account of the whole volume cannot be
deemed inappropriate in this place.

It may be acceptable to prefix a few historical dates, derived in
part from the same source. Saint Francis, the founder and patron
of the Friars Minors, was born at Assisi in Italy in the year 1182;
and he was still a young man when he commenced his scheme of
religious observance. The Rule of his Fraternity was approved by
Pope Innocent III. in 1210, revised in the Lateran council of 1215,
and confirmed by Honorius III. in 1224. At the first general con-
vention of the fraternity in 1217 its numbers were already consider-
able; and in 1219 it consisted of more than five thousand members.
Elate with his success, Francis determined to appoint Provincial

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\textsuperscript{a} This designation was adopted in token of their deep humility: Fuller supposed in
allusion to Jacob's words in Gen. xxxii. 10, \textit{Sic minitor omnibus beneficis suis.}—Church
Hist. vi. 270.

\textit{Camd. Soc.}  

\textit{b}
Ministers in the principal kingdoms of Europe. In the year 1224, two years before the death of their founder, a deputation of nine of the fraternity, four clerics and five laics, arrived in England, with letters recommendatory from Pope Honorius III, and took up their first residence in the Benedictine priory of the Holy Trinity at Canterbury, in which city five of their number soon after formed the first Franciscan convent in England.

The other four proceeded to London, and were first entertained for fifteen days in the house of the Friars Preachers, or Dominicans. Afterwards they hired a house in Cornhill of John Travers, then sheriff, where they made some small cells, and continued until the following summer, when the devotion of the citizens enabled them to remove to the site of their future residence near Newgate. Their first and principal benefactor was John Iwn, citizen and mercer, who gave them some land and houses in the parish of St. Nicholas in the Shambles, by deed dated in the 9th Hen. III. Upon this they erected their original building. The first chapel, which became the choir of the church, was built at the cost of sir William Joyner, who was mayor of London in 1239; the nave was added by sir Henry Waley, who was mayor during several years of the reign of Edward I.; the chapter-house by Walter the potter, citizen and

* Among the other numerous errors of Mr. Stevens in his Supplementary Monasticon (adverted to hereafter) is a misprint, p. 112, of "1224" for 1226, as the date of the death of Saint Francis.

* After Walter Hervy, who was mayor of London at the accession of Edward I., there were only three mayors during the thirty-five years of his reign. Walter Hervy had been elected by the citizens in the last year of Henry III. (see the French Chronicle of London, p. 11), but for some time after the chief magistrate was elected by the aldermen only, and the office became in consequence almost perpetual. Henry Waley was Hervy's successor for one year; then Gregory de Rokesley (presently mentioned in the text) for seven years; and then Waley for four years; after which the king seized the liberties of the city into his own hands, and appointed a custos or warden, who continued for twelve years.