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II

WILLIAM SWADELL, ENGLISH DOMINICAN: HIS FRIENDS AND HIS BOOKS

BY
DENNIS E. RHODES

William Swadell is a good example of an English Dominican whose career is reasonably well documented up to the dissolution of the monasteries in 1538, but whose subsequent existence (if indeed he survived at all) is passed over in silence by the reference books¹. Normally English Friars did not lose their lives under Henry VIII and Edward VI, but were secularized and became curates of churches which often still exist as Anglican. This is what happened to William Swadell. Having found two incunabula which he owned and annotated, I am now able to expand, though not to complete, the outline of his biography. We do not know when or where he was born, but I presume it was about 1490. He was ordained as sub-deacon of the Oxford Convent of Blackfriars on 17 May 1516, then became deacon of the London Convent on 17 December 1519, returning to Oxford as Prior on 21 September 1521. He supplicated for Bachelor of Divinity on 19 March 1523-24, was granted leave by the master general for promotion to Bachelor of Theology on 5 July 1525, and was admitted to oppose for this degree at Oxford on 17 April 1526.

It must have been during one of these residences at Oxford that he acquired an incunabula which is now in the library of Merton College. This is a copy of Aristotle, *De anima*, printed by Johann Koelhoff at Cologne on 28 February 1491². One of the book's earliest owners who has written his name in it is Roger Framwey, who is recorded as a mem-

¹ On William Swadell see A. B. Emden, *Biographical register of the University of Oxford, A. D. 1501-1540* (Oxford, 1974), p. 549; A. B. Emden, *A survey of Dominicans in England ... 1268 to 1538* (Roma, 1967), p. 460.

² Goff A 970; GW 2347.

ber of the Oxford Convent of Dominicans at least from 1505 to 1507³. It was probably he who passed the book on to William Swadell, who has written 'Willelmus Swadell est huius libri possessor' (no doubt at some time between 1510 and 1520), and then 'Hic liber pertinet fratri wilhelmo [swadell] testantibus fratribus videlicet wilhelmo valentyne et christophoro rasthelye'. Neither of these two witnesses is recorded among the Oxford alumni, probably because they were Dominicans who took no degree. A certain Christopher Racchelay was ordained deacon on 31 March 1498, and may be identical with the 'rasthelye' of the inscription⁴. I have not traced a William Valentyne.

Swadell is next officially heard of when he was licensed to preach in the Hereford diocese on 6 October 1529. But we now have a little more information about him before that date, thanks to a second incunable which he is known to have owned. There is in Lambeth Palace Library, London, a copy of *Super Sapientiam Salomonis* by the English Dominican Robert Holcot or Holkot (died 1349), which was owned and annotated by William Swadell. A work written by so notable a predecessor in his own order would be a most natural book for Swadell to possess and to study. This edition was printed by Heinrich Gran at Hagenau in 1494⁵. The Lambeth copy is in a near-contemporary English binding, and probably came to England in loose sheets about 1500, as did so many continental incunables. On a partly torn blank fly-leaf at the end of the volume are written two notes, apparently in Swadell's hand, but at different times, showing that he had been given the book by William Perin (Perrin, Peryn), Bachelor of Theology of Oxford and curate of the church of St. Andrew, commonly known as Undershaft, in the city of London. The note is dated 1 March 1543, or five years after the dissolution of the Blackfriars Convent. William Swadell tells us that in 1543 he was himself curate of the church of 'Fanchurche': from Stow's *Survey of London* we know that 'in the midst of Fenne church street standeth a small parish church called St. Gabriel Fen church, corruptly Fan church'; while St. Andrew Undershaft, in Aldgate Ward, was 'new built by the parishioners there since the year 1520'. St. Gabriel's was destroyed in the great fire of London in 1666.

³ Emden, *Biographical register* ... 1501 to 1540, p. 215.

⁴ Emden, *Survey of Dominicans*, p. 430.

⁵ For Robert Holkot, see Beryl Smalley, *Robert Holcot O.P.*, *Archivum fratrum Praedicatorum*, XXVI (1956), pp. 5-97. Holkot seems to have died of the plague at Northampton in 1349. The Hagenau edition of Holkot of 1494 is Goff H 293, Hain 8761, B.M.C. iii, 683 (IB. 13732).

William Perrin, described in April 1543 as "lately a Dominican or black frier", survived the Reformation to become a chantry priest (for Fulk Basset) in St. Paul's Cathedral, then superior of the old priory of Austin canons in Smithfield, which Queen Mary allowed to be reopened in December 1555. He died in August 1558⁶.

Below the first note is another, still in Swadell's hand, containing some obscure readings and some facts which it is not easy to reconcile with what we know of him already. As the Rev. S. R. Maitland observed many years ago: "There are some further particulars respecting Swadell's academical progress which seem not quite to agree with Wood's *Fasti*"⁷. The note is headed 'in medicinis doctores' and continues thus (abbreviations expanded):

Magister doctor mosgrow commissarius oxonie.

magister leyton) procuratores oxonie.

et magister costisford)

Anno regni regis henrici octavi xvij [i.e. 1527]. quo Swadellus fuit admissus.

Magister Doctor Nicolaus procurator tunc ordinis minorum (?) ut patet in registro

Vniuersitatis, ut vidi intra [? two illegible words] in collegio animarum

[All Souls]

Vniuersitatis predictae.

Scripta sunt hec in die Sancti Daudis annis et Domini et regis Henrici octavi prolibatis. [Signed: D.W.S., i.e. Dominus (or Decanus?) Wilhelmus Swadellus].

This note cannot have been written at the same time (1543) as that which occupies the top half of the same page. It must have been written in 1527. Thomas Moscroff (or Mosgrove, or Musgrave), Fellow of

⁶ For William Peryn (Perrin, Perin), see Walter Gumbley, O.P., *The English Dominicans from 1555 to 1950*, *Dominican Studies*, V (1952), pp. 103-133, especially pp. 103-4. He preached three sermons in the Hospital of Saint Antony in London, which were printed in book form in 1546 (S.T.C. 19786) and again about 1548 (S.T.C. 19787). His 'Spiritual exercyses and goostly meditacions' was printed in 1557 (S.T.C. 19784).

⁷ S. R. Maitland, *A list of some of the early printed books in the Archiepiscopal Library at Lambeth* (London, 1843), p. 405. Anthony à Wood, *Fasti Oxonienses*, new edition with a continuation by Philip Bliss, pt. I (London, 1815) col. 64, merely mentions that William Swadell supplicated for the degree of bachelor of divinity in 1523, which is true. I can find no mention of Swadell in the first edition of the *Fasti*, 1691, nor in the second, 1721.

Merton in 1510, Proctor in 1517, was Commissary or Vice-Chancellor of Oxford from 1523 until his death about the end of August 1527. The note was written while he was still alive. John Cotsford was Proctor in 1515, and Edward Leighton in 1521. To what office or station William Swadell was admitted in 1527 is not immediately clear, unless it means that he too became a Proctor at Oxford.

Who was 'Magister Doctor Nicolaus'? If Swadell made his acquaintance at All Souls, I think he is to be identified most probably with Nicholas Halswell, Fellow of All Souls, born about 1445, a founder member of the Royal College of Physicians, but not a Franciscan (not a member of any religious order at all): so perhaps the reading 'tunc ordinis minorum' of Swadell's note is a wrong one, for his writing at this point becomes very bad. Halswell died in 1528 at an advanced age.

Swadell read Holkot's book, but only at one point in the text did he make a marginal note: on sig. o 5 recto he was struck by a passage quoting Proverbs 26 ('he who puts a stone in a sling'): he wrote his name in the margin, and added 'nota bene et diligenter' as he copied out a little of the Latin text.

One cannot claim that the possession of two incunabula on the part of Swadell argues for a great scholar or book-collector. Nevertheless it indicates that he was interested in philosophical reading, and that he was accustomed to using fifteenth-century printed texts.