

CORPUS CHRISTI Andrew Grattan

IV

Friary

* *The* soft entrails of the overly roseate and mellow, yellow Homeric dawn, had crept over the crowning university spires of Oxford that over-people the bricks and stones, of the colleges and private halls of that city.

Shooting slithers of unblustery, but still softly blowing warming morning air, had slinked their slow way through Oxford's streets, encasing early risers, with slit slivers of cooling shivers, down their curling spines.

Early, warming fronds of soft flowing air, warmingly floated down dreamily along the way of Oxford's streets. The spires were high and gracefully swan-like, their as overly-long elegance of necks, over-arched and sailed above, like some great ship-leading masts, above the buildings that housed these world-defining scholars, who, if not already, would soon be craning and arching their necks into the various volumes and manuscripts, that housed the world's collected, catalogued and stored reams of birthing knowledge.

Working the interlace of his own mind, within the genesis of organized unprivy learning, Andreas Christianus pondered upon an ordered history of the various halls and colleges that circumscribed Oxford University and brought himself, to intermingle with their consanguine conglomeration. Oxford had littered herself to usefulness over the course of many centuries, with many colleges, but, this morning, for Andreas Christianus, Oxford University, was the Oxford of the Dominicans.

An eagle would claim and cull the view to exactitude, fishing it out, from her gimlet eye, Oxford, in all her Sunday best and splendour, soaring above, the adjacent public house, *The Eagle and Child*, or, '*Andrew Eagle & April Child*', in their evangelizing union.

*It was eight o'clock dead on *Corpus Christi* morning, the Year of Our Lord, 2009.

Within Blackfriars, the great Thomas Aquinas Scholar, or Thomist, Fr Dominic Catholicus, within the happy and felicitous bosom of his breakfasting, fellow friars, consumed in jovial happiness, two rounds of freshly made and newly sliced granary toast, smothered in warm, yellow pats of sun-kissed butter and chunky, thick cut, heavily shredded Oxford orange marmalade. Slivers of curled orange pith, he set upon his bread, and watched them settle into the inky depths of orange jelly. The warm mixture melted to a life-affirming joyfulness of yellow and orange. For, Fr. Dominic liked to make a good breakfast.

The unvast belly of the white plastic toaster, without the adjacent larder and the pantry rooms, had fumed upwards, its hissing white smoke, before faint smoulderings of over-toasted bread had begun to emit ancillary smoke of blackening wisps. The white bread had been burnt to a near blackness.

Then, a tertiary change had occurred, and those blackening wisps had changed, and dared to become angry, blacker plumes of writhing, dancing smoke. The swooping, hungry English friars, took more slices of thick bread, and warm creamy rectangles of yellow butter pats, sifting them out from their engreased foil shields with carefully prising knife-blades. Empty cereal bowls, yawningly empty, deprived of cold lashes of breakfast milk, sat cold - the remains of the day's cereal littering to detritus, the bottom of the bowl.

As of yet, no large, pursuing course was on his mind for the day, for he did like to make a good and hearty, rewarding breakfast. He enjoyed a single shot of his customary breakfast juice, a commixture of orange and the fruit of the grape, and two or three steaming cups of hot black liquid coffee, whose texture he never abjured to intertwine with two, flat teaspoons of brown sugar. Customarily fortified for the day, Fr. Dominic would attend then to matters of the pen, the spirit and the heart, in an open-hearted Christian-Humanist kind of a fashion.

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For, the friar, was a world-renowned Thomist, and extensively published within his field, a genial and kind man, unassuming of the great leaning that had brought him from the Irish province of the Dominicans to the English Province of the Dominicans, and to teaching and preaching to, the fresh and fertile minds of the graceful Oxford College of Blackfriars; he thought animatedly of the encroaching day of Sunday rest. Scholarship was not on his mind but scholasticism.

This lovely and gentle man, glanced at the dials of his watch: it was seven-fifty-five precisely. The discipline of the friar's day differed from the monastic proscriptions familiar, from his Novitiate, of such as an Andreas Christianus. The friar had slept the natural and uninterrupted sleep of the just, until natural, yawning wakefulness stirred him from somnolence and slumber. He was happily at home in Oxford; home for him, was the wide and open door of Blackfriars. It was a relatively modern building, a new private *studium* of study and private place.

Razor, had Fr. Dominic brought to his skin, to smooth away bristles from his unplump jaw-line. He had shaved evenly and with care. White, well-apportioned skin cleaved to his loose jaw-line, and when he had showered and dressed, time had elapsed to the measure of ten minutes, and he set himself to some necessary arrangement of his library, which, as of then, consisted of an anomalous heaping of books, arranged in a ragged and zig-zaging manner, aperch and atop each other in a highly unsafe and physically threatening formation. Final, wanted liberty as a senior preacher, had bought him the necessary accoutrements of a real Dominican scholar, meet and happy within the happy letters that had come from his own exploring mind.

Catholicus' Pentateuch of five favourite volumes, lay on either side of the gunmetal and black base of the desk, that sat in stately glory in the middle of the desk, before the swivel chair, its silver fin, its spine, shearing up high, beyond the seat.

Lewis & Short sat in magisterial richness. *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* sat adjacent to it, and the cherry rubicund redness of the *Vulgate*, sat in cherry-red splendour next to that, and Nestle-Aland's *Novum Testamentum Graece*, and the plush blue cover of *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon*. These were volumes, that unknown to him, Andreas Christianus shared too, and he considered them, to be very useful.