

## A CARMELITE BOOK OF HOURS

The Carmelites were one of the four mendicant orders in late medieval France. These friars, wearing the distinctive white mantle, travelled round the country-side preaching, praying and living on the alms of the faithful. The Order claimed its origin from Mount Carmel in Palestine, upon which, the Carmelite annals stated, hermits had lived from the time of the Old Testament prophets, Elijah and Elisha. From then until the fall of Acre in AD 1291 the 'Carmelites' lived a strict, contemplative eremitical life. Sometime in the twelfth century they began to leave their mountain and to travel to the West where they came into contact with the monastic rules of the cenobitic orders. Back in the East they obtained their own rule from Albert of Vercelli, the Patriarch of Jerusalem. In 1226 this was confirmed by Pope Honorius III and more and more monks congregated in the West in the name of Carmel. They migrated first to Cyprus and thence to Sicily, France and England. In 1229 they appealed to Rome for a house in Southern Italy and were formally recognized by Gregory IX as a mendicant order. About this time the name of their order was changed to *Fratres Ordinis Beatissimae Virginis Mariae de Monte Carmeli*. The harsh eastern rule was relaxed and modified by the English Carmelite hermit, Simon Stock, General of the Order in 1247, and the Carmelites, like the more famous Franciscan friars, took on preaching and pastoral duties. The final relaxation of the more severe restrictions of their Rule was sanctioned by Pope Eugenius IV in February 1432. The Carmelites now became totally western, active in court and university circles, and their eastern origin became buried in their liturgy.<sup>1</sup>

By 1450 women were admitted to the Order. In the sixteenth century the Rule was again revised and tightened by Saint Teresa and the modern Carmelites are now again among the more closed orders. There are two Carmelite houses in New Zealand, both of them for nuns, one being in Auckland and the other in Christchurch. The latter was the subject of an NZBC documentary in 1969.

The Carmelites of the late middle ages travelled, like Chaucer's friar, from place to place. They stopped to preach where they could and were known from their distinctive habits of white cloth as the 'White Friars'. Because they were comparatively independent of each other, very few of their own records have survived. But while they left few possessions and made few major contributions to theological scholarship, they were familiar to every medieval village.

In 1958 several original medieval manuscripts were presented to the Turnbull Library by Sir John Ilott. One of these, a little Book of Hours, has proved to have been specially made for a Carmelite friar. It is a small, easily handled, neatly illuminated prayer-book owned suc-