SERIES EDITOR'S FOREWORD

This latest addition to the series makes available two late thirteenth-century collections of *exempla* – the short stories or anecdotes with which medieval preachers sought to enliven their sermons and press home their message. Both were compiled by members of the mendicant orders who placed themselves at the forefront of the drive to instruct the laity – a Franciscan born in Warwickshire but spending much of his career in Ireland and a Dominican almost certainly based in Cambridge. Much of their material was drawn from older authorities, but both collections include material for which the compilers claim responsibility and which can be located quite precisely both geographically and temporally. Historians, following in the footsteps of nineteenth-century folklorists, have become increasingly interested in the possibility that stories such as these, designed to appeal to a lay audience, might open a window onto the attitudes of their listeners as well as of their compilers and allow us to glimpse that elusive quarry ‘popular culture’. Particularly intriguing in this respect are the stories which the preacher claims to have heard first hand, such as John the clerk’s encounter, *en route* to visit his mistress, with a demon in the form of a talking dog [LE 22]. The collections also provide important evidence for changes of emphasis in the Church’s teaching and, indeed, for issues where practice seems to have been in advance of official sanction, as in the possibility of transferring indulgences to the dead. These and other issues are explored and contextualised in David Jones’s valuable introduction.

Of course we have no way of knowing how congregations received these stories and how effective they were in getting across the desired theological point. The compiler of the first collection printed here was evidently conscious that his listeners might take away the wrong message and, unusually, makes the occasional suggestion as to how this might be avoided. Thanks to David Jones’s admirable translation a wider audience will now be able to test their own reaction to this rich assembly of stories.

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