

The Foundation of Fountains Abbey and the State of St. Mary's York in 1132¹

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The recent publication of Mr. Nicholl's 'Life' of Thurstan, archbishop of York (1114–1140),² has made this subject once more topical: and, indeed, for twelfth-century historians at least it will always be interesting. One of the constant themes of the century, and of the 1120s and 1130s in particular, was the question of the state, position and purpose of monks. The 'monastic centuries' were ending and the age of the secular masters had begun. The social purposes that the monasteries had served in the tenth and eleventh centuries were becoming less obvious and outdated. It was necessary that the position of the whole monastic order in society should be reconsidered and this roused strong feelings and bitter controversy. This controversy took place not only outside the monasteries but inside them as well and the great abbey of St. Mary's York is one of the houses where such controversy can be seen and studied.

One of the most revolutionary events in the monastic history of this period in England was the arrival of the Cistercians. To those acquainted with St. Bernard, among them a number of the English hierarchy (Gilbert 'the Universal' of London, who gave him money,³ or Alexander 'the Magnificent' of Lincoln whom St. Bernard told not to love his possessions more than himself⁴), the fiery and uncompromising nature of this new reform cannot have been hidden. Clairvaux, St. Bernard told Alexander, was the true Jerusalem. He wrote to Henry I of the foundation of Rievaulx

¹ The following abbreviations have been used in this article:

M.O.—Dom David Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England*, Cambridge, second edition 1963.

Monasticon—*Monasticon Anglicanum*, by W. Dugdale; new enlarged edition by J. Caley, H. Ellis and B. Bandinel, 6 vols. in 8, London 1817–30.

P.L.—Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, quoted by volume and column.

Nicholl—Donald Nicholl, *Thurstan, Archbishop of York (1114–1140)*, York 1964.

Walbran—*Memorials of the Abbey of St. Mary of Fountains*, ed. J. S. Walbran, Surtees Society, vol. 42, 1863.

² See especially Nicholl, Chapter vi 'The Exodus from St. Mary's to Fountains', 151–192. Since some of my conclusions differ from Mr. Nicholl's I would like here to express my admiration for his work and my debt to it. I have also had the benefit of reading Mr. L. G. D. Baker's unpublished thesis 'Studies in the Narratio de Fundatione Fontanis Monasterii' (Bodleian Library MS. B. Litt. d. 883).

³ P.L., clxxxii. 128, ep. 24.

⁴ Ibid., 169, ep. 64.

in 1132 in terms of magnificent fanaticism and in words suggesting (what he certainly felt) that among the Cistercians alone was true Christianity to be found.¹ Yet a year earlier, in 1131, St. Stephen Harding, the abbot of Cîteaux and virtual founder of the order, had written in a rather different way to the black monks of Sherborne who had brought him up. It sounds a characteristic note of modesty and self effacement, expressing gratitude for what they had done for him. 'Because you are our flesh and bone I remind you that you patiently taught me at Sherborne. I was your monk, and with my staff I crossed the sea so that in me, the least of all your monks, of no importance among you, the Lord has shown forth the wealth of his mercy, that he might encourage me to imitate you'.² It would be undesirable to draw too sharp a contrast between St. Stephen and St. Bernard, yet the Cistercian ideal itself contained this contrast of fierceness and modesty, and it was quietness and self deprecation which were characteristic of the first English Cistercians. St. Aelred of Rievaulx speaks of the monks of Waverley, the first foundation, 'hidden away in their corner'.³ If little was known of them then, less is known now. There are no foundation accounts and very little even in the way of charters and cartularies. Time and accident are partly responsible, of course, but plainly there was very little excitement. This was partly because the great black monk houses were in a good state, and many of them were recent foundations. On the whole the black monks were friendly and well disposed. When a particular individual like Maurice, the prior of Durham, felt the pull of austerity and sanctity he could change his monastery and go to be a Cistercian at Rievaulx without, apparently, at all embittering the relationship between the two houses.⁴ Readers of the lives of the twelfth-century saints will know that such a slipping away to a hermitage was in no way uncommon or unusual.⁵ What Dom Morin called the 'crise de cénobitisme' appeared to make no stir.

The foundation of Fountains Abbey is unique in several ways. Unlike the southern houses we know a great deal about it, and, unlike the southern houses it provoked a considerable amount of noise. When, in 1132, the principal officials of St. Mary's York left their abbey and their abbot to set up house in Skelldale under an elm tree (a tree which Leland saw still growing in the cloister at the Dissolution),⁶ to what they themselves called 'a place of horror and vast solitude',⁷ they let loose a whole train of quarrels and repercussions. During the troubles of the York election, in

¹ P.L., clxxxii., 224, ep. 92.

² P. Hugh Talbot, 'An Unpublished Letter of St. Stephen', *Collectanea Ordinis Cisterciensium Reformatorum*, iii (1936), 66-70.

³ M.O., 230.

⁴ See F. M. Powicke, 'Maurice of Rievaulx', *English Historical Review* xxxvi (1921), 17-25.

⁵ 'Anachoretam vitam non improbo eorum videlicet qui in coenobiis regularibus instructi disciplinens ordinabiliter secedunt': Ivo of Chartres; P.L., clxii. 199, ep. 192.

⁶ *Lelandi Joannis De Rebus Britannicis Collectanea*, ed. T. Hearne, Oxford 1713, iv. 105.

⁷ This phrase is commonly used of Cistercian foundations. The reference is Deut., xxxii. 10. The symbolism of the journey through the wilderness and the devout or Christian or monastic life is old, and common in the Fathers.

1146, the abbey was burnt down, and archbishop Roger (1154–1181) declared that its foundation was the worst act of Thurstan's episcopate.¹

The story has often been told, and cannot be retold in full here.² On 28 June 1132 Richard, the prior of St. Mary's York, together with Gervase, the subprior, approached Geoffrey their abbot—an old man, 'simple and almost illiterate'—with a request for the reform of the abbey. After protracted negotiations an appeal was made to archbishop Thurstan, who visited the abbey on 17 October 1132. A riot ensued, and the archbishop was forced to retreat from the chapter house into the abbey church. Thirteen monks took refuge there with him, removed with him from the abbey, and, after spending Christmas with him at Ripon, received from him the land in Skelldale where the ruins of the abbey they founded still stand.

The evidence for the happenings which led up to their exodus can be reduced to two sources. First is the narrative of the Fountains chronicle,³ dictated in extreme old age by Serlo, a monk of Kirkstall, who had been brought up at St. Mary's York, and who had taken the habit at Fountains c. 1137–8. He was almost a hundred years old when he gave these reminiscences to his amanuensis, Hugh of Kirkstall, in about the year 1206.

Second is the letter, embedded in Serlo's account, and also sometimes occurring in MSS. as a separate text,⁴ of Thurstan to William of Corbeil, papal legate and archbishop of Canterbury, describing what had occurred.

The crucial question for understanding what happened and what, therefore, must be asked of the evidence is, What was the state of St. Mary's York before the exodus occurred? Was it a corrupt house, and if so in what way?

Serlo's account of St. Mary's York before the exodus had something of the tone of the *Exordium Cisterciensium*, the account of the origins of Cîteaux itself, when it described Molesme, the black monk house from which the founders of Cîteaux had made *their* exodus.⁵ Serlo says of St Mary's:

'There were in the monastery of St. Mary's York religious walking in the ways of their fathers, and inheriting their institutions from their seniors without questioning. They lived . . . honestly enough under a rule and an abbot, but for a long time they had lived outside the Precept of *The Rule*, outside the perfection of Christian discipline'.⁶

¹ *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I*, ed. R. Howlett (Rolls Series no. 82), i. 226: 'nunquam gravius deliquisse'.

² See Nicholl, cited above; M.O., 231–9; G. G. Coulton, *Five Centuries of Religion*, i. Cambridge 1923, 413–17; J. H. Newman, *Lives of The English Saints: St. Waltheof and St. Robert*, London 1845, 45–51.

³ Ed. Walbran.

⁴ For the MSS. of this letter see the Appendix.

⁵ The founders of Fountains were naturally conscious of the parallel. The two accounts occur together in MS. Corpus Christi College Oxford 209, where Thurstan's letter is bound up with the *Exordium parvum*: 'Egressio monachi Cistercienses de Molismo et Epistola Turstini episcopi de egressione Ffontanensibus de coenobio Sancte Marie Eboracensis'.

⁶ Walbran, 5.

Now this, written still in the first fine fervour of Cîteaux is in the language of a party—‘*The Rule*’ is St. Benedict’s Rule ‘literally’ observed, ‘the perfection of Christian discipline’ is life as a Cistercian monk. Serlo’s account when examined closely shows that there was very little, if anything at all, which reflects on the state of St. Mary’s as a black monk house. The description Serlo gives is one he would have been perfectly prepared to apply to Cluny under St. Odilo or Westminster under Gilbert Crispin. The aims of the reform party as he describes them were radical, not aimed at the abuses of the system, but at the system itself. ‘*Tota aviditate suspiratur ad heremum, ad laborem manuum*’.¹ ‘They were ashamed to take the name of monks in vain’. That is to say, they were ashamed that they were not solitaries and did not work with their hands.

To discover more we must turn to Thurstan’s letter. First of all it may be asked why he wrote to William of Corbeil at all. The Canterbury—York quarrel would hardly have seemed to have left them on the best of terms. It is possible, though, that here we have been misled by the extreme partisanship of our authorities. Hugh the Chanter, the York historian, several times tells us that Thurstan had a high opinion of William’s character and holiness.² A second reason might lie in William’s position as legate.³ Abbot Geoffrey of St. Mary’s York by no means took the exodus passively. He took the rash step of writing to St. Bernard, as we know from the saint’s replies. In one of these St. Bernard says: ‘With regard to a certain excommunication you wish to discuss, to my mind it would not profit you to consider it, nor me to discuss it’.⁴ Presumably the abbot wished to excommunicate the seceders. With such an intention in mind he would have done well to consult the legate, and Thurstan, if he wished, as he did, to support the seceders would have done well to forestall him. There is every reason to suppose that William would have been sympathetic to him.

Before he had been archbishop he had been a black canon, and the Cistercians and the black canons maintained a close contact. It was Oger, an Austin canon and abbot of St. Nicholas des Prés at Tournai, who took a letter of St. Bernard to Henry of Blois in 1133.⁵ He was a canon of Mont St. Eloi near Arras, the house to which the first English Austin Canons had gone for instruction, that is the canons who had themselves instructed William of Corbeil at the house of the Holy Trinity, Aldgate.⁶ Moreover, we know that at least one Savigniac house, Stratford Langthorne in Essex,

¹ Walbran, 5.

² *Hugh the Chanter: the History of the Church of York, 1066–1127*, ed. C. Johnson (Nelson’s Medieval Classics 1961), 109, 112, 131: ‘sicut bonum et religiosum clericum et canonicum amasset’. We do not have to believe that he did so with Hugh’s reservations.

³ William became papal legate in 1126. The legation lapsed with Honorius II’s death in 1130 and had not been renewed on 26 May 1131, but had been by 7 March 1132.

⁴ P.L., clxxxii. 513, ep. 313.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 225, ep. 93.

⁶ St. Anselm gave Norman and Bernard, the founders of Holy Trinity, Aldgate, a letter of introduction to the abbot of Mont St. Eloi; cf. J. C. Dickinson, *The Origins of the Austin Canons*, London 1950, 99–100. Mr. Dickinson assumes that they did not go there, because they studied at Beauvais and Chartres, but it does not necessarily follow.

was founded with archbishop William's advice.¹ Thurstan was a great patron of the Savigniacs. 'Le mémoire du venerable Thurstan, archevêque de York en Angleterre sera toujours en benediction a la maison de Savigny . . . par la zèle qu'il a marqué dans la fondation de plusieurs maisons de cette Congregation, mais il a donné encore des preuves éclatantes d'une affection et d'une amitié singulière pour notre St. Geoffroy'² (the second abbot of Savigny 1122–1138). Thurstan had obtained a papal confirmation for Savigny on the journey he and William took to Rome in 1125.³ The ideals of the Savigniacs were in many ways close to those of the Cistercians, eremitical and austere.⁴ Eventually (in 1147) the two orders were to combine. There is no reason to suppose that William would have been hostile to what Thurstan had done, and several reasons for supposing that he would thoroughly have approved of it.

It is worth saying this for the letter itself is in some ways a curious document, with passages of considerable vehemence and indeed violence. It exists in two versions, easy to compare, since one, the longer, was printed by Walbran in the 'Memorials of Fountains'⁵ and the other, the shorter, is included in Dugdale's *Monasticon*.⁶ The difference between these two versions is so great that of 563 lines of the letter in Walbran's edition 331 do not appear in the *Monasticon*. When the difference is further compared it will be seen to lie in large compact groups of sentences, mostly embedded in prior Richard's speech to the old abbot, and enlarging it out of all proportion. Besides these passages there are a number of stylistic additions and changes, 'non aliis . . . non aliis', 'propter . . . propter', 'non solis . . . non solis', and a number of small verbal changes which help to harden the tone of the letter, for example, 'molitas consuetudines', softened customs, rather than 'solitas consuetudines'—traditional customs.

The longer passages are extremely verbose and rhetorical and contain relevant texts familiar to Cistercian apologetics,⁷ citations from the Rule and, oddly and anachronistically enough, reminiscences of St. Bernard,⁸ including a reminiscence of the letter which he later wrote to the founders of Fountains.⁹ Among these passages are to be found those referring to Cluny which contain the reference to the reform assembly held by Peter

¹ *Monasticon*, v. 586, no. 1.

² Dom Claude Auvry, *Histoire de la Congrégation de Savigny*, Société de l'Histoire de Normandie 1896, 114.

³ On Thurstan and Savigny, see Nicholl, 143–4.

⁴ The comparison was made in Thurstan's letter (Walbran, 20): 'et si videatur Evangelium emortuum et impossibilem in nobis intueamur monachos Saviniacenses et Claravallenses'.

⁵ Walbran, 11 and 29.

⁶ *Monasticon*, v. 294–6.

⁷ In Walbran's apparatus these passages contain 28 citations from Holy Scripture, including 7 from the Psalms and 9 from St. Matthew. Mt., v. 20: 'nisi abundaverit justitia vestra' occurs twice within a couple of lines. In the shorter version there are 14 citations, but these are verbal reminiscences rather than direct quotations.

⁸ E.g., 'Quid dicam de exquisitis sagitationibus, de diversis saporibus piperibus, et variis excoctionibus quid loquar?' Cf. (as Walbran, 16 n. 10) P.L., clxxxii. 77 (Ep. ad Robertum) or P.L., clxxxii. 910 (Apologia ad Guillelmum).

⁹ Both cite Juvenal, *Sat.* vi. 164, with the same intention. Cf. Walbran, 18.

the Venerable, the odd statement concerning St. Odo 'who alone among Cluniac abbots has written a reasonable book', together with much else which, considering Thurstan's youthful vows to Cluny and his Cluniac deathbed,¹ comes very oddly from him.

There can be very little doubt that this longer version is an amplified and interpolated one and that the letter has received interpolation from a Cistercian in the interest if not necessarily the purpose of Cistercian polemic.² It is very easy to exaggerate the conscious element of deception in this sort of expansion and amplification of an original document. In part, it was simply the product of the process of dictation by which commentary could be easily mingled with text, in part a desire to put Thurstan's thought over clearly; but the association of Thurstan's letter with other material for black monk versus white monk controversy, in at least two MSS., does suggest an unfavourable interpretation of the compilers' motives.³

If these passages are later additions, then we must change our picture of the pre-exodus state of St. Mary's York since among the passages interpolated are those most damaging to the abbey's reputation, to the effect that however many guards or lanterns are provided at night immorality will continue to flourish, because the suspect will always outnumber the honest, and that men are sent out to a life of vice in the abbey's cells as 'custodes villarum, velint, nolint'. Moreover, when the various passages on Cluny, the Cistercian example, rich cooking and the siting of monasteries are removed the whole tone of the letter undoubtedly benefits. It is more like what we should expect from archbishop Thurstan writing to archbishop William.

¹ At Pontefract: Nicholl, 237. For his vow to become a Cluniac, made before 1109 see *ibid.*, 9.

² Mr. Nicholl considers at some length the arguments for the genuineness of the letter (Nicholl, Appendix II: 'Thurstan's Letter to William of Corbeil, Archbishop of Canterbury and Papal Legate,' 251–8) but he does not deal with the question of the two existing versions of it. On the question of the genuineness of the *shorter* text I would certainly accept his arguments, which tend, in any case, to be directed against a theory of forgery of the entire text in the period 1170–1180. I would hold to a theory of *interpolation* of a genuine text rather earlier: see the arguments above and those in the Appendix to this article.

³ A comparison naturally occurs with the theories of M. Lefèvre concerning the earliest documents of Cîteaux itself. Here, too, we have shorter and longer versions of the same texts: *Exordium Cisterciensium*, *Exordium Parvum*, *Exordium Magnum*: *Carta Caritatis*, *Summa Carta Caritatis*, *Carta Caritatis Prior*. The relationship of these documents is still not wholly clear, but, briefly, it may be said that the consensus of opinion at the moment seems to be that the *Carta* certainly underwent development and that the revolutionary Cistercian constitution only developed slowly, but that M. Lefèvre pushes his theories too far on the *Exordium*, and that there is nothing particularly tendentious in its amplifications or wrong with the traditional account of Cistercian origins. If it were desired to prove that Cistercians were sometimes self-righteous and intolerant in their writings and their dealings with other orders we have, after all, St. Bernard's own word for it in the *Apologia ad Guillelmum*, caps. 5 & 6 (P.L., clxxxii. 895–7, recently re-edited in H. Leclercq, C. H. Talbot, H. Rochais, *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, Rome 1963, iii. 90–2). A bibliography of recent work and a summary will be found in M.O., Additional Note C, 752–3. See also M. D. Knowles, *Great Historical Enterprises*, London 1963 199–244 and the latest attempt to sum up the current state of research, P. Zakar S. O. Cist., 'Die Anfänge des Zisterzienserordens. Kurze Bemerkungen zu den Studien der letzten zehn Jahre', *Analecta Sacri Ordinis Cisterciensis*, Annus 20 (1964), 103–39.

If, then, we accept this shorter version of Thurstan's letter as the true one we are left with a rather more negative picture of the state of St. Mary's York and know less about it. True, the language that the shorter version of the letter puts into prior Richard's mouth is still violent.

'We are all covetous and angry and quarrelsome; we take that which is another's, we demand our own in the law courts, we defend fraud and lies, we follow after the flesh and the lusts thereof. We live for ourselves and our own pleasures, we fear to be overcome and glory in overcoming; we avoid oppression, yet oppress our neighbours, we envy others and rejoice and boast in our own prosperity'.¹

This again, like Serlo's language, requires a pinch of salt; it is the language of sanctity and might quite properly have been used, say, of Canterbury in the 1120s which, under prior Elmer, a spiritual writer of some distinction, was certainly in no bad way, though it was a litigious community with a rather insular *esprit de corps*. It recalls a good deal of other language used of the black monks at this time.²

It is perhaps worth examining what else can be known of St. Mary's York. This is not a great deal.

The foundation accounts of the abbey are difficult, but these difficulties are more of detail than general outline: we will give the outline first, and then discuss the difficulties briefly. The story of the whole northern revival of monasticism which led to the foundation of St. Mary's York, Durham, and Whitby has been well told by Professor Knowles,³ and does not require repetition. One point, already noted by him, may be repeated. When the three companions, Aldwin, Reinfrid and Aelfwig, left Winchcombe in Gloucestershire on the journey northwards to visit and eventually to rebuild the northern shrines, their aim was not to found new Benedictine houses:

'Their intention seems to have been to live in poverty and solitude, not primarily to reproduce the monastic life of the south'.⁴

In the event, of course, things were otherwise and Aldwin became the first prior of the cathedral priory at Durham; before that had happened, however, while Aldwin and his disciples were still settled at Jarrow, Reinfrid had left them.

Shortly after the settlement at Jarrow (1076-1078), in the words of Symeon of Durham:

'The third of their companions, Reinfrid, seceded to Streonshalch which is now called Whitby, where receiving those who came to him, he began to found a place for monks, who, after his death, moved to York, where they

¹ Walbran, 19-20.

² For Elmer see the article 'Elmer' in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, iv, 602 and references there cited. For the Canterbury community see R. W. Southern, 'The Canterbury Forgeries,' *English Historical Review*, lxxiii (1958), 193-226.

³ M.O., 159-71.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 167.

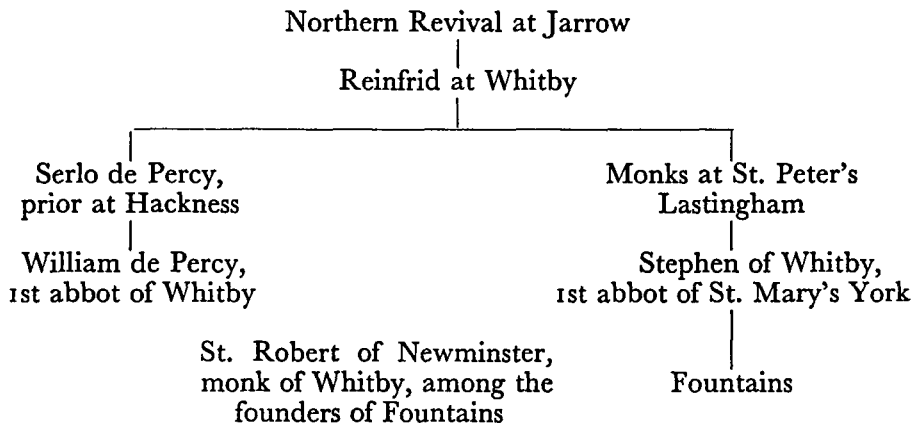
built an Abbey in honour of the blessed Virgin Mary, now efficiently ruled by Abbot Stephen'.¹

Despite this secession Reinfrid was kindly remembered at Durham, for his name appears in the *obit* list,² and also in the 'Liber Vitae', the book of remembrance which the Durham monks kept on their high altar.³

Reinfrid seems to have moved to Whitby for three reasons: partly because of its Bedan associations, partly because of an invitation from the Percy family (his son Fulco was William de Percy's steward and William de Percy gave the land on which Whitby abbey was founded) and partly because of his desire to lead a more solitary life.

Round Reinfrid at Whitby, however, there did gather a community and it is in discussing what then happened that difficulties have arisen, for the story is a complex one.

Reinfrid's community eventually split into two. In their 'Liber Vitae' the monks of Durham wrote down an agreement to pray for the monks at Hackness under a prior Serlo;⁴ and they also wrote down an agreement to pray for the souls of the monks at St. Peter at Lavingham.⁵ These two communities at Hackness and Lavingham both eventually migrated. Serlo de Percy, prior of Hackness, was succeeded on his death by his nephew William de Percy who figures in Symeon of Durham's *Gesta Regum* as first abbot of Whitby. The community at Lavingham went to York where they founded the abbey of St. Mary's under Stephen of Whitby whom all sources call first abbot of York. We may illustrate the whole story with the following diagram:



¹ *Symeon of Durham, Opera*, ed. T. Arnold (Rolls Series no. 75, 1882), i. 110.

² *Liber Vitae Dunelmensis*, ed. J. Stevenson (Surtees Society, xiii, 1841), 144: 'XVII Kal. Jun. Reinfridus Conversus'.

³ *Ibid.*, 44, among the list of Durham monks, though he does not appear in the similar list given by Symeon (ed. cit., i. 4).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 73: 'pro serlone sicut pro monacho ecclesie nostre'. This is written in a hand coeval with the agreements to pray for Walkelin, bishop of Winchester (1070-98) and Malcolm III (1058-93).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 72: 'unusquisque sacerdos X missas et alii cantent psalterium tres, in convento autem sicut pro monacho nostro'.

The difficulty has arisen in accounting for the stages between Reinfrid's community at Whitby and Stephen's community at York. The account accepted here is that given in the narrative of the foundation of St. Mary's, supposedly written by Stephen himself. It has often been attacked. Raine and Atkinson condemned it roundly, but Farrer considers that 'it bears the impress of truth' and Hamilton Thompson that it is 'clearly derived from him' (i.e. Stephen) 'in the first instance'.¹ Its presence in a fine twelfth-century MS. from St. Mary's York² shows at least that its story was that accepted at York then, and for our purpose (to discover the state of the York monks before the Fountains exodus) this might be sufficient.

Stephen (or pseudo-Stephen) gives a clear story. He arrived at Whitby, he says, and shortly afterwards Reinfrid and the community, at Reinfrid's request, gave him the administration of the whole monastery. Then, under pressure from William the Conqueror and the two archbishops (Lanfranc and Thomas I of York) the community, so he says, elected him abbot. He did much to restore Whitby to its early glory, but the house was attacked by pirates, and the community quarrelled with William de Percy. They, therefore, appealed to the king, and with his, and archbishop Thomas's advice, they moved to Lastingham, and from thence to York.

Whatever the trustworthiness of Stephen or pseudo-Stephen, certain points about St. Mary's emerge from his narrative. First, that the idea of mass exodus can hardly have been regarded with horror by the community there, whose whole history was one of exodus. Second, and interestingly, it is 'Stephen' alone of our sources who tells us that Reinfrid left Jarrow from a desire to lead a solitary and eremitical life.³ The idea of exodus for a high ideal, to a solitary existence, was already the tradition of the York community before they left for Fountains.

St. Mary's flourished considerably in the first years of its existence.⁴ In particular, it was endowed with a very large number of appropriated churches.⁵ It also received a large number of remarkable novices, who were perhaps educated by that Laurence Grammaticus who appears witnessing a charter to the abbey dated 1100-1106.⁶ The ability and literacy

¹ For these opinions see the Appendix.

² B.M. Additional MS. 38816, not noted by Atkinson or Duffus Hardy. A collation with the text printed in the *Monasticon* shows no significant variations.

³ *Monasticon*, v. 545: 'desiderii sui non immemor . . . solitariam vitam ducendi Wyttebeiam venit'. Cf. *ibid.*, of the monks at Whitby under Reinfrid: 'Hereticam vitam ducentes'.

⁴ For its foundations at Wetheral (c. 1100), St. Bees (c. 1120), St. Mary Magdalen Lincoln (? c. 1135), Romburgh (1135-6), Richmond (by 1146), see *Monasticon*, iii. 581, 574, 601, 610. The foundation dates of Lincoln and Romburgh are fixed by the foundation charter of the latter in MS. Bodley Top. Suffolk d. 15 (S.C. no. 29006) fol. 32. This stipulates a foundation of thirteen monks (as at Lincoln). It is impressive testimony to St. Mary's that so soon after the exodus to Fountains it could spare so many. For St. Mary's foundation at Colchester (of which William of Corbeil must have heard much when he was prior of St. Osyth's), see *Annales Colecestrenses*, ed. F. Liebermann in 'Ungedruckte Anglo-Normanische Geschichtsquellen', Strassburg 1879, 159.

⁵ In 1344 archbishop Zouch was so astonished by the great number of churches in which St. Mary's had an interest that he ordered a special inquisition to be made on them.

⁶ *Early Yorkshire Charters*, ed. W. Farrer, York 1914-, ii. 133, no. 791.

of the founders of Fountains is striking; one cannot help wondering if the revolt did not have the character of a reaction by the intellectuals against an uneducated remainder.

Four of the founders of Fountains had subsequent reputations as writers and were entered by Leland in the *De Scriptoribus Britannicis*.¹

1) *Gervase*, the subprior of St. Mary's, wrote a 'Lamentatio' just before his death in 1150. In it he tells us that he had been professed for fifty years. He was, therefore, professed about the year 1100 and spent thirty-two years of monastic life at St. Mary's. He returned to St. Mary's for a brief time after the exodus, turned again (after a shattering broadside of a letter from St. Bernard) and died as abbot of Louth Park in Lincolnshire. He received the dedication of Robert of Bridlington's commentary on the Twelve Prophets and was the master of another Cistercian writer, Henry of Saltrey. He it was who originated the idea of reform.²

2) *Richard*, the prior of St. Mary's and first abbot of Fountains, who died in 1139 and was, therefore, perhaps between five and ten years older than Gervase. Serlo describes him as very well lettered, and he received the confidence, trust, and affection of archbishop Thurstan.³

3) *Richard*, the sacrist of St. Mary's and second abbot of Fountains, to whom sermons are credited, now lost.⁴

4) *Ranulf*, monk of St. Mary's and later abbot of Lysa in Norway.⁵

Of the remaining monks of the exodus, three—Walter the almoner, Alexander and Robert—were later to be made Cistercian abbots. They were accompanied by a monk of Whitby, later to be an abbot and a canonised saint, St. Robert of Newminster.⁶ Ralph, the precentor of St. Mary's and, therefore, the monastery's librarian accompanied the party,

¹ *Lelandi Joannis Commentarii de Scriptoribus Britannicis*, ed. A. Hall, Oxford 1709, i. 198, 186, 194, 188.

² 'The Testament of Gervase of Louth Park', ed. C. H. Talbot, *Analecta Sacri Ordinis Cisterciensis*, Annus 7 (1951) 32–46; P. Henriquez (*Phoenix Reviviscens*, Brussels 1626, 56) credits him with a volume of letters written to St. Aelfred of Rievaulx and others.

³ Walbran, 6: 'familiaris et notus pontifici'. He died in Rome on a mission very dear to Thurstan's heart, the attempt to obtain the archbishopric of York for Thurstan's brother Audouen, bishop of Evreux.

⁴ *Lelandi Joannis Commentarii de Scriptoribus Britannicis*, i. 194 and *Collectanea* (ed. cit., above 12, n. 10), iv. 44: 'Omeliae Ricardi Fastolphi Secundi abbatis'. Perhaps these were the sermons in MS. Cotton Galba A III—a Fountains book burnt in 1731. Henriquez (above n. 2) credits him with sermons and also a book on Music or Harmony and four books of commentaries on Scripture.

⁵ He was probably the author of the *Passio et Miracula Beati Olavi*, ed. T. Metcalfe (*Anecdota Oxoniensia*, Oxford 1881). I am not able to agree with Metcalfe that it is wholly the work of St. Eystein (archbishop of Nidaros 1161–88). This is because (a) *The Tractatus Sancti Augustini Episcopi* only begins halfway through the book, (b) whoever wrote the first half was not Norwegian. The reasons for suggesting Ranulf are (a) that he was a writer and abbot of Lysa, (b) that he retired to Fountains in old age, (c) that the MS. concerned (the only one) is a Fountains MS. of 1200–25 bound in a Norwegian seal skin (MS. Corpus Christi College Oxford 209), (d) that St. Eystein had contacts with the monks of Lysa, whom he mentions (Metcalfe, op. cit., 114).

⁶ On whom see cardinal Newman's work (cited above, 13, n. 2) and P. Grosjean 'Vita Roberti', *Analecta Bollandiana*, lvi (1938), 334–60.

but disliking life under an elm tree in February returned to St. Mary's, unlike Gervase, for good. Geoffrey the painter, whose name occurs among the thirteen, represents the artistic side of the abbey's life of which another aspect is seen in Thurstan the goldsmith, who witnessed a number of the abbey's charters in the period just before 1132. How magnificent the abbey was in this respect may be seen in the superb sculptures of the late twelfth century still surviving in the York museum.¹

The only contemporary of the prior and subprior whom I have been able to trace is Durand, monk of St. Mary's, elected abbot of Selby in the 1120s, who is described by a largely hostile writer² as a man 'very prudent in matters outside the monastery . . . sufficiently learned in liberal knowledge, and really remarkable when it came to oratory and legal matters'—a description which might very well be applied to prior Richard. Their subsequent histories were, however, very different. Durand had to be deposed and exiled to Cluny as a result of 'a familiarity with suspect persons' which his biographer compares with king Solomon's.

Some neglected evidence as to the literary interests of St. Mary's and as to its foreign contacts is provided by the St. Mary's subscription to mortuary rolls. Three mortuary rolls which date before 1132 and have subscriptions from St. Mary's are known.

First is that of the abbess Matilda of Caen, which arrived at York and was subscribed somewhere between 6 July 1113 and 24 February 1113.³

'Quod petitis vestris donare praetitulatis hoc petimus nostris donare subtitulatis, scilicet domno Stephano primo ecclesiae nostrae abbate et fundatore, Rainfrido Priore, Hildeberto Priore, Raimundo Monacho'

—and there follow thirty-one other names, the majority of them Old English. This list is followed by three sets of verses headed with the names Peter, Benedict and Richard. Peter's verses are not of the highest order:

'Si posset lacrimis revocare vestra
Mathildis

Jam multis lacrimis esset revocata
Mathildis

¹ L. Stone, *Sculpture in Britain: the Middle Ages* (Pelican History of Art 1955), 101 plates 71–3.

² *Selby Coucher Book*, ed. J. T. Fowler (Yorks Archaeological Society Record Series, x (1891)), i. 24.

³ *Rouleaux des Morts du IX^e au XV^e siècle*, ed. L. Delisle, Société pour l'Histoire de France, Paris 1886, 196–9. Abbot Stephen can have died only recently. His *obit* is given as 9 August (*The Ordinal and Custumal of St. Mary's Abbey York*, ed. by the Abbess of Stanbrook and J. B. L. Tolhurst, Henry Bradshaw Society 1936, ii. 371). In 1114 the king gave the abbey to Richard, a monk of Caen (*Two Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, ed. J. Earle and C. Plummer, Oxford 1892, i. 244). The policy of appointing Norman abbots was, of course, universal, but particularly in view of the strongly English nature of the Northern revival and of the York community one may wonder if the appointment was popular. Until the fifteenth century the St. Mary's Use was of a much more Old English complexion than that of any other abbey save Muchelney (*Custumal*, ed. cit., iii. Appendix 1. i–iv).

Sed quia non possunt lacrimae revocare
Mathildem
Ergo preces studeant super astra locare
Mathildem’.

Benedict’s verses make a slightly more dexterous attempt at the same sort of rhyme, beginning as quatrains and declining to couplets. The verses headed as Richard’s gain interest as possibly the product of one of the two Fountains’ Richards; they are better than the other two, not particularly unusual but literate, and scanning:

‘O hominum sine laude genus quod vivere natum
Ipsam se proprio perdidit arbitrio’ etc.

The second mortuary roll which can be mentioned is that of St. Bruno, subscribed in 1102. The verses (printed by the Bollandists)¹ are competent enough, but the interest lies in the other names on the roll, for the roll itself shows that St. Mary’s was in touch with the Grande Chartreuse, and St. Mary’s subscription occurs on it after those of Cîteaux and Molesme. So soon, then, after their foundation the names of these houses were known in Yorkshire and must have raised questions in those who subscribed the roll.

The third roll with a St. Mary’s subscription is the famous roll of the Blessed Vitalis of Savigny, who died in 1122. This is a simple subscription with neither names nor verses which is worth noting as a specimen of St. Mary’s handwriting easily obtainable (since Delisle printed it in facsimile)² and because the Savigniacs appear to have influenced the ideas of the early reformers.

To sum up, then, on this fragmentary evidence it would seem plain that St. Mary’s York in 1132, despite the ‘simplicity and illiteracy’ of its abbot, enjoyed a relatively high state of literacy and artistic cultivation and had for some time had at least vestigial knowledge of the new reform. Such knowledge cannot, however, have been very detailed for, in 1132, when Gervase the subprior approached prior Richard with the idea we are told that the prior was thunderstruck—‘Expavit ipse de novitate rei’. He consulted the archbishop and it may have been this occasion that caused Thurstan to write for advice to Theobald of Etampes, a master of Oxford, whom he may have known in his youth at Caen or Bayeux. It is difficult to imagine what other circumstances in Thurstan’s archiepiscopate can have given such point to the questions which Theobald answered.³ These appear to have been: Should monks hold churches and receive tithes? Should monks live in cities? No, says Theobald, they should rather live as the

¹ *Acta Sanctorum Octobris*, iii. 757. There are two sets of verses, one rhymed, the other in hexameters.

² L. Delisle, *Rouleau Mortuaire du B. Vital Abbé de Savigny*, Paris 1909.

³ See R. Foreville and J. Leclercq, ‘Un débat sur le sacerdoce des moines au XII^e siècle’, *Analecta Monastica* 4th series, *Studia Anselmiana* fasc. 41, Rome 1957, 8–117; see also the summary of the much wider controversy by Giles Constable, *Monastic Tithes from their Origins to the Twelfth Century*, Cambridge 1964, especially 136–98.

primitive monks, in common, and by the labour of their hands.¹ They should not frequent cities or castles, but should rather live in places far from all secular strife.² This was to set the cat among the pigeons at St. Mary's York.

Certainly it was to reform just such 'abuses' that prior Richard approached his old abbot, originally not in the spirit of secession, but in that of reform. He outlined a scheme so that 'the Rule' could be properly observed at York just as in a hermitage.³ It would be interesting to know more of this scheme—one feature was either to abandon tithes entirely or to devote them to the poor.

This was the language of the new reform with a vengeance and it is no wonder that the old abbot did not receive it very happily or that he should hastily have sent out for reinforcements and for lettered men to combat this new dialectic.⁴ It may be re-emphasised that it was the *novelty* of these ideas which struck prior and abbot alike.

Earlier it was said that the rejection of the longer version of Thurstan's letter as interpolated reflects rather unpleasantly on the Cistercians: but there is a reverse side to such a rejection and it is this, that it undoubtedly re-emphasises the importance of the arrival of the Cistercians at Rievaulx in 1132, since it must have been their arrival which first caused the monks at York to reflect upon their own status and first caused Gervase to approach prior Richard, with consequences of considerable importance for the religious life of the north of England. If it was not the corrupt state of St. Mary's York, but rather the impact of the new ideals which caused the Fountains exodus, then this says much for the example set by the Rievaulx Cistercians. We have the positive words of both the Fountains chronicle and Thurstan's letter that indeed it was this example which fired the monks of St. Mary's York, and this in turn is evidence for the high standards prevailing at St. Mary's, and the excellence of the traditions given to St. Mary's by its founders that its monks should have responded so immediately. Although the Cistercians appealed to the past, as so often in the Middle Ages this was in fact the excuse to found something new. The Cistercians were not merely reformed Benedictines; Molesme was already

¹ 'Sed potius sicut primitivi monachi, de labore manuum et de communi vivere debent'.

² 'Non civitates vel castella frequentare, sed loca ab omni strepitu seculari remota potius inhabitare'.

³ 'Vix in heremo quam in urbe regula teneri putaretur'. An inconsistency corrected by abandoning the longer version of the Thurstan letter may here be noted: the longer version supplemented the description by adding 'Scriptis ubi quoque domus edificare'. There was no question at this point of moving from St. Mary's York.

⁴ Walbran, 8: 'missis itaque nunciis per angliam monasteriis viros convocat litteratos'. Whether the 'Rescriptum pro monachis' (Foreville and Leclercq, ed. cit., 54-111) was written at St. Mary's cannot be said certainly. The grounds for dating it before 1133 are both negative and tentative (ibid., 32-3). It is a reply to Theobald's letter, but by some one apparently not well acquainted with the situation—though his ignorance may well have been diplomatic: 'Absit ut aliquis sanum sapiens aliquatenus crediderit, quod tantus pontifex . . . Tantillum clericellum . . . presertim post susceptum episcopatus officium de statu Ecclesie potius ex ignorantia quam ex industria consuluerit' (ibid., 32).

a strictly reformed house when the founders of Cîteaux went out from it; black monks and white monks represented different excellences which it is well to remember when considering the conflict between them which, as Professor Knowles has said, 'would seem capable of arousing new interest and enlisting fresh enthusiasm in any age'.¹ Abbot Geoffrey and his former prior, abbot Richard, at any rate came to terms of some sort, for they are to be found together witnessing the charter by which Thurstan confirmed the church of Hackness to Whitby abbey.²

¹ M. D. Knowles, *Cistercians and Cluniacs* (for the Friends of Dr. Williams's Library, Oxford 1955), 1, reprinted in *The Historian and Character and Other Essays*, Cambridge 1963, 50-76.

² W. Farrer, *Early Yorkshire Charters*, York 1914-, ii. 224, no. 877.

APPENDIX I

Manuscripts of Archbishop Thurstan's Letter to William of Corbeil

I. Manuscripts of the Longer Version.

1. *MS. Corpus Christi College Cambridge 139*. A most detailed analysis of this MS. has recently been given by P. Hunter Blair, 'Some Observations on the "Historia Regum" attributed to Symeon of Durham' in *Celt and Saxon*, ed. N. K. Chadwick, Cambridge 1963, 63-118. For our purpose the most important part of his discussion is the note on p. 118 in which he states that Dr. Vaughan and Professor Cheney have together discovered the ex libris of Sawley (a daughter house of Fountains) by means of ultra violet light. Amidst its large variety of contents it contains, written together 'in a fresh, upright, and regular hand' (M. R. James):

- (a) fols. 150-2v. The autobiography of Stephen of York.
- (b) fol. 152v. A short and peculiar paragraph dating the foundation of Fountains, with a very elaborate chronology.
- (c) fols. 153r-8r. The longer version of Thurstan's letter.

2. *MS. Corpus Christi College Oxford 209*. For a fuller description see Metcalfe (op. cit.) and Coxe's *Catalogue of MSS. of the Oxford Colleges*, ii. A singularly beautiful MS. from Fountains of the first quarter of the thirteenth century. Mr. L. G. D. Baker was the first, as far as I know, to doubt that it was the oldest of the MSS., and to discover its later dating. It contains:

- (a) The Soliloquia of St. Augustine.
- (b) The Life and Miracles of St. Olaf.
- (c) The Longer Version of Thurstan's Letter.
- (d) The Two Accounts of the Origin of Cîteaux, the Exordium Parvum and the Exordium Cisterciensium.

3. *MS. Bodley 39*. (For a fuller description see *The Chronicle of St. Mary's York*, ed. H. H. E. Craster and M. E. Thornton (Surtees Society cxlviii, 1934), ix-xiii.) A small, rather ugly MS. from St. Mary's York written in the early part of the fourteenth century.

It contains:

- (a) The Rule of St. Benedict.
- (b) A form of admission of a novice to St. Mary's.
- (c) The Rule of St. Augustine.

(d) Various Benedictine Constitutions.

(e) A custumal of the abbey.

(f) The autobiography of Stephen, the first abbot of St. Mary's.

(g) A 'wholly untrustworthy' list of abbots of St. Mary's (so M.O., 231).

This is generally recognised, but the list is printed in both the V.C.H. and the *Monasticon*. For the first three abbots the following are the most likely dates: Stephen c. 1085 × 1112; Richard 1114 × Feb. 1123; Geoffrey × Feb. 1123 × 1138.

(h) Annals of the abbey to 1267 (these have been influenced by the Annals of Louth Park, a Fountains foundation (Craster, xii), and detailed annals of St. Mary's York, 1258–1326.

(i) The Longer Version of Thurstan's Letter.

4. *B.M. MS. Cotton Otho C.XIV* (for a fuller description see T. Smith's *Catalogue of the Cotton MSS.*, Oxford 1696, 73–4). It was once a good MS. of the thirteenth century, but was badly burnt in the fire of 1731. Only fragments remain, but quite enough to show that it contained the Thurstan letter as a separate text, and that it was of the Longer Version. It originally contained also letters of St. Bernard and Eugenius III, (among them letters relating to the York election of 1140) and an *Epistola Rhetorica ad Monachum Fugitivum*. Dr. O'Sullivan kindly informs me that archbishop Ussher's transcripts from this MS. in MS. Trinity College Dublin D.3.10 (Abbot 780) do not contain any Fountains material.

5. *MS. Trinity College Cambridge o. 1. 79*. For a fuller description see M. R. James's *Catalogue* No. 1104. A long roll of the fifteenth century containing Hugh of Kirkstall's chronicle in which the letter is embedded. It has been assigned by Dr. Ker to Fountains, but on the basis of its contents only. The chronicle, like all the surviving medieval MSS. of the chronicle, is incomplete.

II. Manuscripts of the Shorter Version.

1. *MS. Bodley Dodsworth 26*. A transcript made for Dodsworth, and corrected in his hand, made from MSS. in the Tower of St. Mary's York before it was blown up in the Civil War, containing Hugh of Kirkstall's chronicle.

2. *B.M. MS. Arundel 51*. An anonymous transcript of Hugh of Kirkstall's chronicle made about 1600.

3. *B.M. MS. Lansdowne 404*. An anonymous transcript of Hugh of Kirkstall's chronicle, of the seventeenth century.

It might seem at first sight that the preponderance of medieval MSS. and their common agreement in the longer version of the letter might make a theory of interpolation untenable. But it may be argued:

1. That a comparison of the texts renders interpolation at once likely from the compact nature of the blocks of sentences omitted in the shorter version and from the nature of the passages concerned.

2. That three of the five medieval MSS. have been interpolated at one point at least, where, at the moment at which the monks of St. Mary's left their abbey there is a paragraph beginning 'De hiis tredecim octo abbates fuerunt' and going on to incorporate information about their subsequent careers, some of which was not available until 1154 (fourteen years after Thurstan's death). This paragraph has been placed in the margin in MS. Corpus Christi College Cambridge 139 (the

Sawley MS.) and is burnt in Otho C.XIV. It does not occur in MS. Trinity College Cambridge o. 1. 79 (the fifteenth-century roll).

3. The seventeenth-century MSS. (Arundel and Dodsworth) are our only authorities for the continuation of Hugh of Kirkstall's chronicle to the time of abbot John de Cancia, and only one out of four MSS. of the chronicle contains the Longer Version of the letter.

4. At least two MSS. of the chronicle are lost. One, seen by Leland, was much fuller than any we now have (Leland, *Collectanea*, ed. cit., iii. 105). There was also a MS. of the chronicle in the library of Sir Henry Langley in Shropshire (Walbran, ed. cit., xiv).

5. All the medieval MSS. are of Cistercian provenance save MS. Bodley 39. This is untrustworthy in other ways and shows (see above) Cistercian influence in the annals which it contains. At least two of the MSS. (Corpus Christi Oxford 209 and Otho CXIV) contain material which could have been used in white monk-black monk controversy.

6. Mr. Nicholl's arguments (ed. cit., 251-258) should, of course, be compared with these. But, as has been said, he argues against a theory of *forgery* not of *interpolation*. Perhaps 'amplification' would be a fairer word to use, and if we use it then the difficulties connected with conscious forgery vanish. I see no reason to doubt that the shorter version is genuine and anyone disposed to do so will, I think, be convinced by Mr. Nicholl's arguments.

APPENDIX II

A Brief Note on the Sources for the Transition 1 of the Whitby Community to York

This whole problem has been extremely well dealt with by Professor Hamilton Thompson (A. Hamilton Thompson, 'The Monastic Settlement at Hackness', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* xxviii (1924), 402-18). The sources are:

A. Two accounts of the foundation of Whitby Abbey:

1. A narrative in Bodley MS. Dodsworth 159 (ed. J. C. Atkinson, *Cartularium Abbatiae de Whitby*, Surtees Society, lxix, pp. xxxviii-ix).

2. The 'Memorial of Whitby', which appears to have been written by a monk of Whitby about the year 1160 'with due regard to the feelings of the Percy family' (Whitby Cartulary, ed. cit., 1-7).

B. The Durham Sources:

3. Symeon of Durham, who, unfortunately, has not much to say; almost all he does say is quoted in this article.

4. A certain amount of corroborative evidence from the 'Liber Vitae' and the Durham confraternity agreements, again almost all quoted in this article.

C. 5. Domesday Book.

D. 6. The narrative of Stephen, first abbot of St. Mary's York (ed. Atkinson, *Cartularium de Whitby*, xxxiv-vii, and *Monasticon* iii. 544-6).

The difficulties in Stephen's narrative are:—

(a) That the Whitby sources make no mention of Stephen.

(b) That Stephen makes no mention of the Hackness community or of its prior Serlo, for whose existence we have certain testimony in the Durham confraternity agreement.

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- (c) That the 'Memorial of Whitby' says that Serlo succeeded Reinfrid as prior at Hackness.

It is true that there are times when it is difficult to imagine that 'Stephen' is genuine. But most of the difficulties lie on the surface. The following pieces of evidence can be brought to support his story.

- (a) Domesday Book shows that in 1087 the abbot of York held Prestebi and Sourebi from William de Percy. This property had been greatly improved and put under cultivation. Hamilton Thompson suggests that the monastery at Whitby was granted this land after organisation under Stephen, that as it was in Stephen's name he was able to keep it after the migration to Lastingham and that William de Percy seized it after the Conqueror's death.
- (b) The Dodsworth account corroborates Stephen's story that the monks were driven from Whitby by pirates and has a separate account of a quarrel between Serlo and William de Percy, which helps to corroborate Stephen's story of a quarrel with William de Percy.
- (c) The Mortuary Roll of the abbess Matilda of Caen signed at York in 1113–1114 gives, among the names mentioned for prayer, 'domno Stephano primo ecclesiae nostrae abbate et fundatore, Rainfrido priore' etc. So early, then, Reinfrid was held to have been a prior of the York community. If he were to have remained at Hackness as a prior under obedience to Stephen, to have died, and been succeeded by Serlo with a subsequent gradual divergence between the two communities, this is no more than what Hamilton Thompson had already conjectured, and this is one more fragment to support his thesis. But the main lines of the story are not in doubt.