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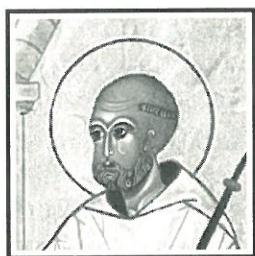
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VIR AUTEM Domini Albericus, in schola Christi per novem annos et dimidium regulari disciplina feliciter exercitus, migravit ad Dominum fide et virtutibus gloriosus, et ideo in vita aeterna a Deo merito beandus. Nunc successit quidam frater Stephanus nomine, anglicus natione, qui et ipse cum aliis de Molismo illis advenerat, quique amator regulae et loci erat. Huius temporibus interdixerunt fratres una cum eodem abbate, ne dux illius terrae seu alius aliquis princeps curiam suam aliquo tempore in illa ecclesia tenerent, sicut antea in sollemnitatibus agere solebant.

YET THE MAN of the Lord, Alberic, having contended cheerfully in the discipline of the Rule in the school of Christ for nine and a half years, went home to the Lord, distinguished by faith and virtues, and therefore deserving to be blessed by God in life everlasting. A brother, Stephen by name, English by ancestry, succeeded him. He too had come here from Molesme with the others and was a lover of the Rule and of the place. It was during his time that the brothers, along with this same abbot, forbade the duke of that land or any other prince to hold his court at any time in that church as they previously been in the habit of doing on solemn feasts.

Exordium parvum. Chapter 17



The New Monastery under Stephen Harding

An English Benedictine Account by William of Malmesbury

In [Pope Urban II's] day¹ arose the monastic observance of the Cistercians, which now is both reputed and believed to be the very best way of moving along towards heaven. To speak about it does not seem at odds with the work I have undertaken, since it redounds to the glory of England, which produced the worthy man who was the author and agent of that monastic observance. Ours he was, and as a boy served the apprenticeship of his early years in our schools. If we are not stirred by envy, therefore, we will welcome his good deeds the more gratefully the closer we feel to him; likewise, my purpose is to extol his praise because the mind is at its best if you approve in another the good which you do not aspire to in yourself.

He was called Harding among the English, born of not obscure parentage. From childhood he was a monk of Sherborne, but when he reached adolescence worldly nettles gave him an itch and, having come to loathe those threads, he took off first for Scotland and then for France. There, having labored at the liberal arts for several years, he felt the goad of godly love: once mature age had put aside childish fumbings, he set out for Rome with a classmate as his companion;² neither the distance nor the difficulties of the journey, nor the scantiness of their resources, even once succeeded in preventing them from chanting the entire psalter every day, both coming and going.

Actually, the mind of this worthy man was already yearning for what he undertook, not much later, by God's grace; now, having got back as far as Burgundy, he shed his curly locks at Molesme, a large, new monastery, and he readily re-learned the first elements of the

1. 1088–1099

2. Peter of Jully; see below, page 63, n. 9.

Rule he had previously seen. But when other observances were put to him, which he had neither read in the Rule nor seen elsewhere, he began—modestly, of course, as becomes a monk—to delve into the reasoning behind them, saying: 'By reason, the supreme Creator has made all things, by reason he governs all; by reason the fabric of the poles revolves, by this same reason even those stars which are called 'shooting' follow their erratic path, by reason the elements are directed; and by reason and by equilibrium our own nature ought also to subsist. But because [that nature] often falls away from reason by sloth, various laws were once upon a time laid down. Last of all, through blessed Benedict, a Rule was divinely promulgated which was to call the flux of nature back to reason; although there are in it things whose reason I am not clever enough to penetrate, I nevertheless consider that its authority should be acquiesced to. For reason and the authority of the holy scriptures, although they may seem to differ, are one and the same: Yet since God has created, or recreated, nothing without reason, what could induce me to believe that the holy fathers, zealous students of God, would ordain anything contrary to reason, as if we were meant to put our faith only in authority? So for those things which you forge, adduce either a reason or an authority. Even though not much credence should be given to something just because some human reason can be alleged—since it can be undermined by an equally persuasive argument. Wherefore, give examples from the Rule which are supported by reason and authority, inasmuch as it was dictated by the spirit of all the just.³ Because if you cannot do this, you vainly profess its preeminence when you scorn to follow its teaching.'

Opinions of this sort, wending from one [person] to others, as happens, quite properly move the hearts of God-fearing folk, for they may take fright that they are running or have been running all to no purpose.⁴

This discussion, kept simmering in frequent chapter meetings, therefore, came to this conclusion: the abbot himself approved of the opinion that only the pith of the Rule was to be studied in depth,

3. Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* II.8.8; SCh 260:166.

4. Cf. Gal 2:2

and accretions to it were to be set aside. So there were elected two brothers in whom knowledge of letters squared with monastic observance, who by vicarious consultation were to investigate the intention of the author of the Rule and propose what they found to the others. The abbot worked assiduously to bring the entire community to consensus, but because rooting out from human minds something which has long been ingrained is no easy task—because they spew out unwittingly what they imbibed at their first gulp—nearly all of them refused to accept the new things because they loved the old.

Only eighteen [monks], among them Harding—who [was also called] Stephen—tenacious in their holy stubbornness, left the cenobium with their abbot; declaring that they could not keep the purity of the Rule in a place where a congestion of wealth and indigestion of foodstuffs were choking even the resistant mind. They came therefore to Cîteaux, formerly a very forested area but now, by the monks' oft repeated activities, so open to light that it is not undeservedly thought of as an intimate of the very Godhead. There, with the support of the archbishop of Vienne, who is now the apostle,⁵ they took up the task memorable and venerable to all the world.

And certainly many things seemed harsh,⁶ but especially these: they wore no fur or linen, not even that finely spun woollen fabric we call linsey-woolsey; they never wear trousers, except when sent on a journey, and these they return, cleaned, when they come home. They have two tunics with cowls,⁷ and wear no extra in winter, though in summer, if they choose, they may lighten it.⁸

They sleep in their clothes and belts,⁹ and never at any time return to the beds after Vigils: but they so adjust the hour of Vigils that the light comes up before Lauds; so protective are they of the Rule that they would never think of passing over a single jot or tittle

5. Calixtus II (1119–1124)

6. RB 58.13

7. Cf. RB 55.10–11

8. Cf. RB 55.1–5

9. Cf. RB 22.5

of it. Immediately after Lauds they sing Prime; after Prime they go out to work for the appointed hours; anything to be done or sung they complete during the day, without artificial light.¹⁰ No one is ever absent from the day hours, nor anyone from Compline—except the infirm; the cellarer and the guestmaster, after hearing Compline, wait on the guests, while scrupulously observing the silence.¹¹ The abbot permits himself no dispensation beyond the others: he is everywhere present, everywhere shouldering his care for his flock. Only at meals is he not present, because his table is always with the pilgrims and paupers.¹² Nevertheless, wherever he may be, he is sparing of verbiage and victuals; for neither to him nor to the others are more than two dishes served,¹³ and never lard or meat, except to the infirm.¹⁴

From the Ides [13th] of September until Easter, no matter what the festival, they never break their fast save once a day, except on Sundays.¹⁵ They never leave the enclosure except on work assignment; neither there nor elsewhere do they ever speak to one another, except to the abbot or prior. The canonical hours they keep up tirelessly, adding no extras extrinsic [to the Rule], except for Vigils of the Dead. At their divine offices, they use Ambrosian chants and hymns, insofar as they have been able to learn these from Milan. While taking good care of guests and the infirm, they apply insupportable crosses to their own bodies as a restorative for their souls.

These things abbot [Robert] himself was doing and urging on the others during that first great flush, but with the passage of time this delicately reared man came to think better of it, and ill bore such scantiness of daily food. Coming to know what he wanted (whether by word of mouth or by letter is uncertain), the monks still living at Molesme, applying pressure to a willing [subject], bundled

10. Cf RB 41.9

11. Cf. RB 42.10

12. RB 56.1

13. Cf RB 39.1,3

14. Cf RB Cf RB 36.9

15. Cf RB 41.6

him back to that monastery by an obedience cleverly wrested from the pope. As if he were worn down by the imprudence of those entreating him,¹⁶ he left the confining walls of paupers and again took up his expansive [abbatial] throne. All those who had come with him followed him out of Cîteaux, except for eight. These, few in number but many in merit, made one of their company, a certain Alberic, abbot and Stephen prior. The former did not linger in this life more than eight years before being gathered happily up by sovereign decision.

Then, doubtless at the divine nod, Stephen, although absent, was elected abbot, the erstwhile leader of the whole undertaking and the special and banner ornament of our generation; the greatness of his merit is attested to by the sixteen abbeys now established by him, and seven [more] under way. So he, God's resounding trumpet, guides those ranged about him toward heaven, now by a word, now by example; doing nothing short of the precept [rule]: affable in speech, pleasant in appearance, always cheerful in the Lord in outlook. From this comes the joy of an overtly handsome countenance; from this, covertly, [comes the joy] of a permeating dew; for, weary of this dwelling place, he longs with unflagging love for the homeland.

He is held in high regard by everyone because God generously pours into the human mind a love for men whom he loves. Wherefore any resident of that territory who gives his money to God through that man's hand counts himself blessed. He has received a good many things; but what with his meager expenses for his own and his [brethren's] needs, he quickly disburses the rest on the needy and in building monasteries. Stephen's pouch is, in fact, the public treasury for all needy persons. An indication of his abstinence is that there, unlike at other monastic houses, you will never see things shining with gold, glistening with gemstones, or sparkling with silver; now, as the pagan says, 'What is gold doing in a holy place?'¹⁷ We all consider something in sacred vases trifling unless the enrichment of stones encases the base metal shell—or the blaze of topaz

16. Cf Lk 11:8

17. Persius, *Satyricon* II.v.69

or the violet of amethyst or the herbal glow of sapphires; unless the priestly vestments dance in gold; unless the walls sparkle with polychromed paintings and coax the sun into the nooks and crannies. But they, holding in second place what mortal men falsely esteem as first, put all their efforts into adorning their way of life. They love resplendent minds more than golden vestments, knowing that the very best payback for benefactors lies in the fruit of a pure conscience.

Whenever the compassion of this praiseworthy abbot either wants, or acts as if he wants, to bend a bit of the rule's yoke, they argue him out of it: saying that they have a life not so much ahead of them as behind them: that they hope to persevere in their resolve and as an example to those who come after them, who, if they themselves were to become lax, would fall into sin. And indeed this would happen in no time because of human weakness; whose everlasting rule is that nothing brought to birth with excruciating labor can last very long. But, let me summarize everything which is said, or can be said about them: the Cistercian monks today set the standard for all other monks; [they are] a mirror for the diligent, a gad-fly for the indolent.

Deeds of the Kings of England, Book IV