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THE EARLIER DAYS OF ST. STEPHEN HARDING

WE may recognize a tendency in some modern writers to depreciate the part taken by St. Stephen in the foundation of the Cistercian Order. This tendency is perhaps due to a certain suspicion of William of Malmesbury as an historian swayed in his judgement by chauvinist sentiment. For such a charge as is implied the *Acta SS. Bollandiana* can scarcely be held responsible, seeing that they tell us that, after the return of St. Robert, St. Alberic, and St. Stephen to Molesme about the year 1093, with the permission of the Apostolic Legate they chose Cîteaux as the site of their *novum coenobium . . . actore potissimum S. Stephano*. The statement is sufficiently concise (*Acta SS. Bollandiana*, Aprilis, Tom. I, die 17; cf. Watkin Williams, *Monastic Studies*, 121 sqq.).

William of Malmesbury, who died in 1143—John Bale in his *Scriptorum Illustrium Majoris Brytannie Catalogus* (Basiliae, 1559) would put the date a year earlier—gives us what is practically a contemporary record of his subject, for St. Stephen was alive until 1134. Moreover, he would have been favourably situated for the purpose of obtaining information from those who had known him as a boy at Sherborne. He speaks of him as a well-born Englishman, *a puero Schireburniae monachus*, who when he arrived at adolescence, conscious of the *seculi urtica* and hating the habit (*pannos illos perosus*), left the monastery and made his way first to Scotland—probably *Scotia Major*, i.e. Ireland—and soon afterwards to France. Having spent some years in the study of *litterae liberales*, he became conscious of a different stimulus, that of Divine love; and, seeing that fuller maturity had dispelled his *pueriles ineptiae*, he set out for Rome, accompanied by a *clericus* who had been the companion of his studies, in such an edifying spirit that neither the length or difficulty of the way nor lack of opportunity ever hindered them from singing antiphonally the whole psalter both on their outward and on their homeward journey. On their return to France this remarkable young man was so inspired that, when by the Grace of God after reaching Burgundy he found the great new monastery of Molesme, *crinem abjecit, et prima quidem elementa Regulae olim visa facile recognovit* (Guill. Malm. *Gesta Reg. Angl.* iv. 334, ed. Stubbs, ii, *Rolls Series*). Then we have a report professing to be the *ipsissima verba* of St. Stephen spoken in defence of his objection to certain observances proposed to him *quae nec in Regula legerat nec usquam viderat*, words spoken modestly and as became a monk. He takes his stand upon reason, since according to reason God once created and now rules the universe. Laws, the expression of authority, were, he contends,

enacted to protect reason; such were the laws enacted by St. Benedict in the Rule. The Rule is thus founded upon reason; its authority is one with that of reason in precisely the same way as is that of the Sacred Scriptures. Any enactment which fails to stand the test of reason is suspect. So much we gather.

The monks who feared God were moved to consider whether they were or had been running in vain; frequent Chapters were held at which the question was discussed, and finally the Abbot, supported by the Community, resolved that, *supersedendum superfluis, solam medullam Regulae vestigandam*. Thereupon followed the appointment of two monks, distinguished both *scientia litterarum* and *religione*, to inquire into this matter. Their report failing, in spite of their Abbot's best endeavours, to be generally acceptable, the migration of the said Abbot, St. Stephen and seventeen other monks, *sancta obstinatione pervicaces*, took place to a new home, which proved to be Cîteaux (op. cit. iv. 335). Later (op. cit. iv. 337) William, when speaking of St. Stephen's election—fitting, as of *dux olim facti totius*—to the abbacy of Cîteaux in 1108, gives us a charming vignette of one *sermone comis, facie jucundus, animo semper in Domino laetus*.

William seems to tell a plain straightforward story. We get the impression of a young man who, we are disposed to think, had been no more than oblated at Sherborne and was so far not a renegade from religion. In view of the statement that on arrival at Molesme *crinem abjecit*, need the *a puero monachus* mean more than oblation? No primary authority seems to have aspersed his character on this score. Père Othon Ducourneaux (*Les Origines Cisterciennes*, 129, ed. Paris, 1933) writes: 'Était-il réellement profès, ou n'était-il tenu que par la promesse de son oblation, impossible de savoir'. He would have known, as an oblate, the *prima elementa* of the religious life—which later at Molesme *facile recognovit*—sufficiently to feel at the time that his vocation was not thereto. The *seculi urtica*—the attraction not of vice, but of an honest life outside the cloister—moved him. Was it his own fault or was it the result of injudicious pressure put upon him that he had come to loathe the livery of the cloister? He was evidently a high-spirited youth, full of fun; he had his *pueriles ineptiae*; but were they more than pillow-fights and booby-traps? He had, however, his love of letters; there was in him the making of an educated mind. Free, as we believe him to have been, he goes off on his search after that good thing learning. The Schools of Ireland do not meet his needs, and he crosses two seas to reach France, where in course of time he makes friends with a fellow student, a young cleric, with whom in most serious mood he makes the pilgrimage to Rome, on the return from which he finds himself

at Molesme. Of the ultimate destiny of his friend nothing is said. William, it is to be allowed, opens his whole account with evident sense of satisfaction that St. Stephen was an Englishman, *quod ad Angliae gloriam pertineat, quae talem virum produxerit qui hujusce religionis fuerit et auctor et mediator. Noster ille . . .* (op. cit. 334). But Helinandus the Chronicler, a monk of Froidmont, writing in the first quarter of the thirteenth century, does not hesitate to accept this from him: *Pertinet ad gloriam Angliae quod talem virum genuerit qui hujus religionis auctor fuit et mediator. Is fuit Hardingus* (Helin. Frig. Mont. Chron. i. 47, an. 1099; ed. Migne, P.L. ccxii. 990).

In referring at the proper place to his election to the abbacy of Cîteaux William, we have noticed, speaks of him as *dux olim totius facti*. In telling of his ideal of monastic simplicity he asks in the words of the *gentilis* (Pers. Sat. ii. 68 sq.), like St. Bernard in the *Apologia* (xii. 28), *in sancto quid facit aurum?*

Now to the credit of William as an historiographer let us cite the testimony of perhaps the most reliable of his editors, Bishop Stubbs. 'He prides himself, and with some reason, on his delineation of character.' So far from being chauvinist, 'he avails himself of the privilege of his mixed blood to take a somewhat neutral position in the rivalry of Norman and Englishman'. The 'monumental value' of his work is marked by the fact that, while the student 'comes across sharp sayings and humorous allusions', he does not find William making capital out of them as 'a more thoroughly developed and educated *littérateur*' would have done (op. cit., ed. William Stubbs, i, Pref. x, *Rolls Series*). This testimony is surely to the point.

The *Exordium Magnum Cisterciense* is a work to the date of which we find some clue in the fact that it records (*Dist.* ii. 32) the death of Peter Monoculus, eighth Abbot of Clairvaux, which occurred in the year 1186. What it has to say about St. Stephen as one who *primus inter primos ferventissimo studio laboravit* has already been told, beginning at *Distinctio* i. 15 and ending with *Distinctio* i. 23, the story being far longer than that of any other of the first five Abbots of Cîteaux. In recording his election to the abbacy of Cîteaux it speaks of him as an Englishman who had been one of the original migrants from Molesme who formed the nucleus of the *Novum Monasterium*; a monk of conspicuous holiness, *eremi amatorem et ferventissimum sanctae paupertatis aemulatorem*. In his youth he had left his home and kindred and gone on pilgrimage to the *Limina Sanctorum Apostolorum*. He had not, *sicut fieri solet*—a significant comment—occupied himself on his journey *otiosis fabulis*, but he had found time to praise God, he and his companion singing together daily the entire psalter. When he returned to France he went to

Molesme ibique sacrum monastici Ordinis habitum suscepit. Nothing is said about previous studies in any schools, or about any companion except that he had one on his pilgrimage; and it is implied that he was like-minded to himself. Nor is it suggested that he was already a monk, or had been a *nutritus* of any monastery. The writer gives us the impression that his chief concern is with what St. Stephen is going to be as Abbot of the *Caput Ordinis*, and this, we feel, is natural and reasonable. We fail to detect any reminiscence of William of Malmesbury. Where earlier (*Dist.* i. 11 sqq.) the story is told of the foundation of Cîteaux, there is no mention of St. Stephen's name except where it occurs in the Rescript of the Apostolic Legate Hugh, Archbishop of Lyons, together with those of St. Robert, St. Alberic and others. The writer probably obtained the material for this portion of his work chiefly from the *Exordium Parvum*, for which St. Stephen himself was ultimately responsible, and in which, suitably enough, nothing encomiastic of him is to be found.

The Jesuit Father, Pierre François Chifflet, published at Dijon in 1660, together with other works, the *Vita* of a certain Blessed Peter, Prior of Jully-les-Nonnains, a daughter of Molesme founded in 1113. The manuscript of this *Vita* was seen and handled by him at Clairvaux during the abbacy of Claude L'Argentier. It was in a volume which contained Odo de Diogilo's history of Louis le Jeune's *Profectio in Orientem*, the *De Miraculis* of Herbert of Torres, the *Vita Quarta* of John the Hermit (the only known manuscript copy—Chifflet believed it to be the original text) and the *Chronicon Clarevallense*. At the Revolution this volume passed to the Bibliothèque de la Ville at Troyes, from which, probably in the second quarter of the last century, it was stolen by the bibliomaniac Libri-Carrucci. It was, after some years, discovered in the Laurentian Library at Florence (fonds Libri 1906). Chifflet in editing this *Vita* of Blessed Peter of Jully-les-Nonnains collated it with a copy of the same *Vita*, of which he found a twelfth-century manuscript at the Cistercian Abbey of La-Charité in the diocese of Besançon.

This Peter is described as an Englishman of noble birth and of good education, who after the death of his parents resigned his heritage to his brothers and an only sister and migrated to France. Here he wandered on visits to monastic houses, and in course of time met, somewhere on the confines of Burgundy, Stephen Harding, a young man of common interests with himself. They became friends, and subsequently they together travelled to Rome, where they venerated the *loca sacra* with due devotion. The *Vita* does not speak of Peter as a *clericus*, but it reports the two friends to have acquired the habit of daily recitation of the psalter before their pilgrimage to Rome.

On returning to France they were led by Providence to Molesme, and were so much edified by the life of the community that they both took the habit there—*veste saeculari in habitum religionis commutata*. Père Othon Ducourneaux suggests 1088 as the date of this event (op. cit., loc. cit.). It may be said in passing that the name 'Pierre' is a variant of the name 'Pron' or 'Perron'. The Clairvaux monk, Guillaume Flammeng, who wrote a French Life of St. Bernard early in the sixteenth century, uses these forms indifferently (*Vita S. Petri Prior. Juliac*, ed. Migne, P. L. clxxxv. 1258 sqq.; cf. Jobin, *Saint Bernard et sa Famille*, 150 sqq. and 173, Poitiers, 1891). This then is the testimony of a *Vita* of St. Peter or St. Pron written by an anonymous contemporary in a manuscript of the twelfth century; it gives us a pleasing picture of two young Englishmen travelling together bent on pious purposes—a picture which, in its main features, quite independently confirms William of Malmesbury's account.

The name of Angelo Manriquez, a monk of the Cistercian Abbey of Huerta in Old Castile, stands high in the list of historians of the early days of the Order. The first volume of his Annals—the full title of which is *Cisterciensium seu verius Ecclesiasticorum Annalium Tomus Primus*—was published at Lyons in 1642. In this volume (*Introd.* ii. 4 sq.) he writes of St. Stephen at some length, speaking of him as a well-born Englishman, a monk *professione, induto habitu* at Sherborne—*quod vitae genus ab adolescentia sectabatur*. His departure from England, first to Scotland and thence *in Galliam Parisios*, is stated to have been *studiorum causa*. Having here drunk deeply of profane learning and exhausted sacred learning—a young man *sermone comis, facie jucundus, animo semper in Domino laetus*—he sets out for Rome in order to visit the *sacra loca* in company with the *clericus* who had been his fellow student. The story goes on, evidently following William of Malmesbury's record, to tell of their daily recitation of the psalter in spite of all the obstacles presented on the journey. Manriquez suggests that it was the visit to Rome which was responsible for St. Stephen's *perfectioris adhuc vitae . . . conceptum votum*; a source of joy with which both of the travellers returned to France, where in the district of Langres the recent fame of Molesme diverted them to its gates. The foundation of a new monastery, or rather of a new Order, seems to have at once suggested itself to St. Stephen. There were St. Robert and St. Alberic, but *deerat tertius* to make the rope of three strands never to be broken, destined to bind together so many by its heavenly constraint. It was a real trial to lose the *vetus societas* of his friend, who refused to remain at Molesme. For all St. Stephen's losses, *parentes, fratres, opes, gloria mundi*, and then the parting from a good and proved friend,

would even the fellowship of so many holy brethren compensate? Yes; a certain *occulta vis* was preparing him for Cîteaux. Why else was the welcome of Molesme, of Abbot, Prior and Community so cordial, as to one who *auxit . . . conventum*?

It is impossible not to recognize in all this the influence of William of Malmesbury. The *sermone comis, facie jucundus, animo semper in Domino laetus* seems to be accepted as a *vera effigies* of St. Stephen. An interesting detail, found in none of the earlier records cited, is supplied, namely, that he went to Paris on his arrival in France. But where else should he have gone? More interesting, perhaps, is the detail that the companion of his travels refused to remain at Molesme. William says nothing even of his arrival there; his *redeuntes* implies no more than that Peter returned to France from Rome with St. Stephen; the *Exordium Magnum* is silent about him after the pilgrims reached Rome; from it we should not know that he ever left it. It is only from Chifflet's edition of the *Vita* of Blessed Peter of Jully-les-Nonnains that we get the full story of St. Stephen's fellow student and of his subsequent doings. We may assume that neither William of Malmesbury nor the writer of the *Exordium* had ever heard it. As for Manriquez, it was a discovery made too late for him to profit by it—or he would scarcely have committed himself to the statement that Peter definitely refused to remain at Molesme. It is, however, to the purpose that he nowhere betrays any suspicion that he may be taking his cue from a chauvinist. Nowhere does he suggest any recoil from William's strongest expression, *dux olim totius facti*. However, in referring to St. Stephen's daily occupation on the pilgrimage to Rome he remarks: *Mirum in juvene, quamvis religioso*—a word which he would not have used in any other sense than that of a monk—confirming his earlier statement, *professione fuit monachus*. This seems to imply more than William's *a puero . . . monachus* and to necessitate, as might be thought, a conclusion which we hesitate to accept, that St. Stephen was a renegade from Sherborne, or at best a mere *gyrovagus*. Were this the case, the Abbot of Molesme does not appear to have known it. Surely there is no foundation for such a tale!

WATKIN WILLIAMS