

THE FIRST CISTERCIAN ERA

IN the year 1151 there died Raynald, fifth Abbot of Cîteaux, seven years before the death of Peter the Venerable in 1158 and within about two years of the death of St Bernard in 1153. The first chapter of Cistercian history was drawing to its close. Raynald, son of Milo, Count of Bar-sur-Seine,¹ had been a monk of Clairvaux and was a man dear to the heart of St Bernard, who refers to his decease in touching terms: 'My lord of Cîteaux has left us desolate; a sore wound to the whole Order. On me, in very truth, falls a double sorrow, who in one man have lost both a father and a son.'² Peter had ruled at Cluny since 1122, Raynald at Cîteaux since 1134; thus for seventeen years the two men were contemporary abbots, each of his own *Caput Ordinis*.³

The Dijon MS 82 (114) contains certain *Instituta Generalis Capituli apud Cistercium* which have been usually ascribed, as they are by Migne, to Abbot Raynald. Migne gives only eighty-seven sections, but the Dijon MS gives ninety-six, and states that the last seven of them are the work of the General Chapter of 1152. This MS came from Cîteaux, where it was inventoried⁴ by Abbot Jean de Cirey in 1480; it is dated by Guignard at 1173-1191. The solution offered by the latter is that the *Instituta* were, in substance, prepared by Raynald and, after his death, submitted to the General Chapter by his successor, Abbot Goswin, and by it redrafted and approved.⁵ They are the first authoritative document of the kind known to have been promulgated by the General Chapter since the days of the *Charta Charitatis*, the *Consuetudines*, and the *Exordium Parvum*; they represent the Cistercian standard as it was more than fifty years after the foundation of the Order.

Generally and in detail they testify to a fidelity to the original ideals which, considering both the period elapsed since the foundation of Cîteaux and the wide expansion of the last thirty years, is very remarkable. The Cistercian monastery, essentially a *coenobium in deserto*, must still be founded in a secluded spot, far from cities and from fortified places⁶; and the Cistercian monk is still required to provide

¹ Order. Vital. *Hist. Anglor.* viii ap. Migne clxxxi 1725 n. (2).

² S. Bern. *Epist.* cclxx 3.

³ *Gall. Christ.* iv 985 and 1137 sqq.

⁴ This inventory is the Dijon MS 610.

⁵ Guignard *Monuments Primitifs de la règle Cistercienne* xvi; Migne *op. cit.* 1725 sqq.; *Nomasticon Cisterciense* (1664).

⁶ *Inst.* i.

his daily food by the labour of his hands in cultivating the land and in tending cattle. The Order may hold real property, and the possession of granges at various distances has, amongst other causes, led to the existence of *conversi*, who may, however, be received only by episcopal licence, and are treated as brother monks alike in spiritual and in temporal matters. There appears to be no recognition of the choir-monk as in a class apart.¹ Manual labour is not for the purpose of making profit; it is to be limited by the needs of the monastery naturally including therein the provisioning of the guest-house and the feeding of hired workmen (*artifices conducti*) whose services may from time to time be required.² The prohibition of any kind of fur clothing, of linen undergarments and of ample cowls (*cucullae deforis floccatae*) is endorsed; what is worn must be strictly as is prescribed in the Rule of St Benedict.³ Fugitive and expelled monks have evidently been a difficulty; owing to their reception in other houses than their own, discord has been created. This is dealt with in several of the *Instituta*. Whether monks or *conversi* or novices were in question, their reception after escape or expulsion was a grave menace to the discipline of the Order. Even a fugitive monk or *conversus* is not to be received into another monastery; he is to be urged to return to his own house; if he refuses, he is to be stripped of his habit and expelled. A novice, however, may be sent away from his own monastery with letters of commendation, in which case he may be received elsewhere, but not otherwise; a provision which suggests that a *novice* may be given an opportunity of doing better in new surroundings, a proceeding, be it said, by no means Benedictine.⁴ To receive, even in the guest-house, monks who come from known or neighbouring monasteries was forbidden by the Rule, a prohibition which yet did not apply to monks who came from great distances.⁵ This prohibition is relaxed by the *Instituta* so far as to allow the former to stay in the guest-house; but, in view of the possibility that, either by personal influence or by violence, their own abbots may unfairly be deprived of them, it is to be only for a short time. These various particulars indicate that in some measure scandals have arisen, the recurrence of which must be prevented, and that a certain laxity existed which imperilled the essential Benedictine principle of stability (*stabilitas*).⁶

¹ *Inst.* viii.

² *Inst.* v; xxiv.

³ *Inst.* iv; xv. Cf. S. Bern. *Epist.* i 11. The flowing Cluniac habit was, perhaps a little ostentatiously, rejected by the Cistercians.

⁴ *Inst.* xi; xvi

⁵ *Reg. S. P. Bened.* lxi.

⁶ *Inst.* xi; xvii. *Reg. S. P. Bened.* iv and lviii. Cf. Butler *Benedictine Monachism* 27 sq. In the *De Praecepto et Dispensatione* xvi St Bernard deals with the safeguarding of this principle.

No less threatening to the discipline of the Order was the custom of monks living outside the cloister, which is the monk's proper habitation. Plainly there is the suggestion of a beginning of irregularity on this score. The *Instituta* expressly forbid monks to live extra-claustrally; a monk may be sent to the granges, presumably for the purpose of manual labour, but he is not to live at a grange. In order to avoid all risk of spiritual disaster (*periculum animarum*) the only dwellings which may be built outside the monastery are such as are exclusively for the housing of animals.¹ The possibility of there arising the necessity for a monk or for a *conversus* to sleep upon some occasion at a grange is reasonably contemplated, but the necessity must be grave.²

The danger of monks attending fairs and markets is fully recognized. It is again insisted that the Order does not trade for profit.³ Sometimes poverty may compel an abbey to sell its goods in order to buy necessaries. In this event not more than two brethren, monks or *conversi*, may be dispatched to the nearest market to do the business with the least possible delay; they and their horses are to be fed at the charges of their own abbey—nothing is said as to where they are to sleep—they are not to buy for themselves fish or other delicacies; they are to eat sparingly and to drink their wine well watered (*bene aquatum*); they are not to trade in anything except for the legitimate purposes of a religious house; finally, they are not to cross the English Channel, unless their abbey is near a port, and necessaries cannot otherwise be obtained!⁴ We may smile, but these Cistercian reformers were terribly in earnest. It may have been *la fermeté*,⁵ but it was holding its own, and, as yet, there was remarkably little evidence of reaction against it.

It might happen that a man, out of his own resources, built an abbey for the Order. Should such a man wish to be professed a monk either in that or in any other house, he may receive no preferential treatment. The utmost care is to be taken (*magnopere nobis est cavendum*) to prevent his being dispensed from the novitiate prescribed by the Rule.⁶ Respect of persons is a drug which, in the end, recoils as poison upon the reformer. The same self-respecting impartiality which had moved St Stephen to forbid Hugh II, Duke of Burgundy, the best of friends to Cîteaux, to hold his court in the abbey-church was still alive in the Order.⁷

¹ *Inst.* vi; xxi; lxix.

² *Inst.* xlii.

³ Cf. *Inst.* v.

⁴ *Inst.* xlix. Cf. *Reg. S. P. Bened.* lxvi: 'Non sit necessitas monachis vagandi foris; quia omnino non expedit animabus eorum.'

⁵ M. René Bazin has distinguished the Cistercian method of reform as *la fermeté* from that of the Cluniac as *la persuasion*, the former represented by St Bernard, the latter by Peter the Venerable. *Millénaire de Cluny* i 17.

⁶ *Inst.* xxiii.

⁷ *Exord. Parv.* xvii.

The relation of Cistercian houses to the diocesan episcopate is dealt with. No man may by the order (*propter iussionem*) of the diocesan, whether bishop or archbishop, absent himself from the General Chapter. This does not mean that the Cistercians refuse to their diocesan ordinary the obedience stated by their Constitution to be due to him, for whenever a daughter-house is founded care is to be taken that, as a preliminary step, the *Instituta* shall be shewn to him; but evidently there had been some occasion or occasions upon which, as the Cistercians considered, the authority of the diocesan had been arbitrarily exceeded.¹ The election of a monk to a vacant see may not be accepted without the approval both of his abbot and of the General Chapter, saving always the direct command of the Pope himself.² Moreover, a monk who becomes a bishop is still under obligation to observe the Cistercian customs as to food, clothing, and the recitation of the Hours; with this exception, namely, that he may, if he so wish, wear a cloak of coarse cloth or of sheepskin and a hat of similar simplicity; but, whenever he enters within a cloister, or has dealings with a house, of the Order, he is to doff these symbols of his dignity—so that he may not appear singular among his brethren.³ He may be allowed, if necessary, two Cistercian monks and three *conversi* as his attendants, provided that they be charged with no secular business.⁴ It would seem that, normally, he is required, at least if an archbishop, to attend the Annual General Chapter, for it is laid down that at this Chapter ‘the archbishops of our Order’ deal with the excommunication of brethren who have gravely offended by theft, conspiracy, or incendiarism. Here it is interesting to notice, first, that the attainment of monks to metropolitical rank was accepted as a thing quite natural and fitting by the Cistercians, as it was by the Cluniacs and by the Black Monks generally—was not Eugenius III (1145–1153) at the very moment seated upon the Papal throne?—and then, that apparently the Cistercian archbishops, as a body, were in some definite sense responsible to the Annual General Chapter for the excommunicated brethren of the Order.⁵

Emphasis is laid upon the precept of silence,⁶ the observance of which was, doubtless, increasingly difficult, as the numbers grew; enquirers, novices, and *conversi* were constantly arriving, to whom the discipline in question was at first strange and irksome; visitors, bond-servants, artificers, and hired labourers would have been an element

¹ *Inst.* xxxiv.

² *Inst.* xxxvi.

³ Here again we recognize the effort to maintain the Benedictine stability. Cf. Butler *Benedictine Monachism* 127 sq.

⁴ *Inst.* lix.

⁵ *Inst.* lxii.

⁶ *Reg. S. P. Bened.* vi.

disturbing to taciturnity. Monks and *conversi* working at granges are allowed to speak only to the superior who directs them, and to the guest-master.¹ Even visiting abbots may be a menace to regularity; not only are they enjoined to refrain from hindering a monk from his work without express permission, but they are forbidden to speak to more than two monks at a time—they are not to gather around them a little audience!—if they wish to talk together themselves, they are to retire to the monks' parlour or to the place nearest thereto.² No monk or *conversus* may speak either after Compline or at table; if at table his signs are not understood he is to use one word only, as water, bread, or the like; if he offends on this head he is to punish himself by abstaining from wine, if it is provided, or, if it is not provided, and there are two dishes, by refusing one of them.³

The monks are not to conduct schools for boys either inside or outside the cloister; the only persons whom they may instruct are those already professed and the novices; moreover, no one under fifteen years of age may be admitted as a novice.⁴ Thus the *Instituta* appear to exclude oblates (*pueri oblatis*) entirely. The oblate was required by the Rule to be under age (*minori aetate*),⁵ which was generally understood to be under fourteen years,⁶ but the point was disputed; some authorities held that, for this purpose, a boy came of age at ten years.⁷ The Cluniacs took elaborate precautions for the protection of the boys who were in their monasteries.⁸ Peter Damian, however, about a hundred years earlier than the date of the *Instituta*, gave great praise to the Cassinese monks because he found that they had no schools for boys;⁹ and even a cursory perusal of his *Liber Gomorrhianus ad Leonem IX*, written in 1049, is sufficient to justify the exclusion of boys as a very reasonable, possibly very necessary, measure of reform, at any rate in those days. We may suppose that the Cistercians, in this as in other grave matters, declined at any price risks which the Cluniacs, with admirable precautions, be it said, were willing to accept. Again, it was *la fermeté* that characterized Cistercian reform.

The same insistence upon simplicity in the externals of worship which is found in the *Exordium Parvum* occurs also in the *Instituta*, certain modifications here and there in the latter suggesting that they

¹ *Inst.* lxx.

² *Inst.* lxxx.

³ *Inst.* lxxix.

⁴ *Inst.* lxxvi.

⁵ *Reg. S. P. Bened.* lix.

⁶ Rich. de S. Angel. *ap. Martin. Reg. Comment.* lix *ap. Migne* lxxi 840.

⁷ Martin. *Reg. Comment. loc. cit.*

⁸ Udalric. *Antiq. Consuetud. Cluniac. Mon.* III viii sq., *ap. Dach Spicileg.* iv 175 sqq.

⁹ Petr. Dam. *Ad Cassinenses* III xxxvi 16.

deal with questions which have been actually raised; the *Exordium* forbade gold chalices, the *Instituta* allow them and the *fistulae* to be of silver gilt; the *Exordium* ordered the vestments to be of fustian or of linen, the *Instituta* allow the stole and the maniple to be of silk.¹ As regards the decoration of the church, however, there is offered no relief of the primitive bareness; as the *Constitudines* required the windows to be figureless and colourless, so also do the *Instituta*.²

There is some evidence that abbots had at times usurped such episcopal functions as the blessing of nuns at the consecration of the latter, and that they had baptized infants. The one is absolutely prohibited; the other is allowed only *in articulo mortis*, when no priest is available.³ This is noteworthy as indicating the restriction of the monk within his own sphere, which is, properly, not the pastorate, a restriction which was increasingly accepted as legitimate by the Benedictines everywhere, as generally by the older Orders with the exception of the Premonstratensians⁴; the point being that normally the monk is cloistered; as Peter the Venerable wrote, he watches for the souls of men, not by the administration to them of sacraments, but by the offering of his prayers, his tears, his alms, and his manifold good works,⁵ an offering made within the cloister as a monk, not outside it as a parish priest; the *monachus* and the *sacerdotium* are essentially distinct one from the other; to correct confusion of the two is a measure of reform, certainly from the Benedictine point of view.⁶

As has been suggested, the value of these *Instituta* consists, for our purpose, in the fact that they testify to the persistence of the spirit of the New Monastery; what variations from the early documents there are—and they are but few—may be explained by the effort to keep that spirit really alive *in the growing body* of the Order; what additions there are, prompted by fifty years' experience of risks and of failures, evidently are directed towards the same end.

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¹ *Exord. Parv.* xvii; *Inst.* x. The normal Trappist vestment of to-day is entirely of wool or of linen, innocent of embroidery.

² *Consuetud. Cisterc.* lxxx ap. Guignard *op. cit.* 272; *Inst.* lxxxi.

³ *Inst.* xxix. Cf. Migne, note (10) *ad loc.*

⁴ Coulton *Five Centuries of Religion* ii 148.

⁵ Petr. Ven. *Epist.* I xxviii ap. Migne clxxxix 142.

⁶ *Reg. S. P. Bened.* lx and lxii. Abbot Butler (*Benedictine Monachism* 127) remarks, on the authority of Bishop Ullathorne (*Ecclesiastical Discourses* 315), that 'the early Benedictine missionaries established monasteries not parishes'.