

## PETER THE VENERABLE <sup>1</sup>

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**E**IGHT hundred years ago, on Christmas Day, 1156, Abbot Peter of Cluny, known to posterity as Peter the Venerable, ended his long reign of thirty-four years. Although his name is unfamiliar today to all save medievalists, his passing, which followed hard upon the death of St. Bernard three years earlier, does in fact mark the end of an epoch. With the disappearance of those two patriarchs, the great age of monasticism, the Benedictine centuries, came to an end, and the vast movement of reform known by the name of Gregory VII, which had derived its impulse and its ideal in large part from monks, slackened and changed its character. St. Bernard has never lacked admirers and biographers; Peter has been all but neglected, especially in this country.<sup>2</sup> It is for this reason that it seemed fitting to present the outlines of his portrait in this centenary year. Before doing so, however, it may be well to begin with a few words of introduction for those to whom Cluny is a name only, and perhaps not even so much as a name.

The great movement of reform that began in the tenth century, and which brought about a renewal and an extension of the religious life of Western Europe without parallel in the

<sup>1</sup> A lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library on Wednesday, the 9th of May, 1956.

<sup>2</sup> The works of Peter the Venerable are in Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 189; they are there reprinted from the *Bibliotheca Cluniacensis*. There is a moderately good article on him in the *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, xii (1933), 2065-2081, by Dom Séjourné, and a short appreciation, with bibliography, in J. de Ghellinck, *L'Essor de la littérature latine*, i (1948), 190-3. The only recent study is by Dom J. Leclercq, *Pierre le Vénérable* (St. Wandrille, 1946). Mr. Giles Constable, of Harvard and Iowa Universities, is preparing a critical edition of the letters, and is acting as co-editor, with Dom J. P. Muller, of a series of studies of Peter's life and activities, to be published by the Benedictines of the international college of Sant' Anselmo, Rome, in their series *Studia Anselmiana*, to mark the year of the eighth centenary.

medieval millennium, was in origin and in direction the work of monks and was primarily a spiritual renewal, though it manifested itself to contemporaries and to later historians most clearly in the revival of papal organization and in the contest between the Papacy and the Empire. Almost all its leaders were monks—Romuald, Peter Damian, Cardinal Humbert, Gregory VII, Anselm, Bernard, Urban II, Eugenius III—and it aimed, and in part succeeded, in monachizing the Church, by putting before the clergy, and even before the laity, monastic discipline and monastic practices and ideals as the universal way of salvation. This epoch, which succeeded the most lawless and dark period of continental history, had as its harbinger, its morning star, the foundation of the Burgundian abbey of Cluny in 910.

Cluny had in its origin nothing to distinguish it from similar new beginnings in the past save in one respect—the abbey had been put directly under the patronage of the church of St. Peter at Rome, thus freeing it from all dependence upon a local lord or bishop. Cluny prospered; the abbey came to have dependencies; and abbots of Cluny were called to reform other monasteries. Gradually there grew up a large group of monasteries following Cluniac customs. A series of saintly abbots kept standards high. But for a hundred years or so Cluny was no more than a great and influential abbey. The crucial change took place early in the eleventh century, under the saintly and long-lived Odilo, who ruled from 994 to 1049. He made of Cluny's dependencies and allies a single tightly organized family, within which only Cluny itself had complete autonomy and of which the abbot of Cluny was the sole and immediate head. He and his advisers at Cluny appointed all superiors and imposed all regulations; every individual of the dependent houses owed obedience directly to him. Odilo's prestige and that of Cluny itself in the century of religious awakening, led to the affiliation of more and more monasteries. The process was continued, with something like geometrical progression, under Odilo's successor, the equally saintly and long-lived Hugh the Great, who ruled 1049-1109. Under him Cluny touched its apogee, a great community of 300 monks, the cream of the religious and social élite of France, ruling over a network covering France,

Spain, North Italy, the Low Countries, and (after 1070) England, and extending even to the crusading kingdoms of the Levant. At Cluny itself Hugh rebuilt the great church on a still vaster scale; the enormous Romanesque basilica was, with its transepts and towers, until the early seventeenth century the largest church in Christendom.<sup>1</sup> As abbot, Hugh ruled over more than a thousand monasteries, all of which shared to a greater or less degree in the tradition of rich and precious ornament, of elaborate ceremonial and of lengthy liturgical service, that was Cluny's interpretation of the monastic life.

As so often happens with an institute or empire, the moment of greatest external splendour occurs when the internal, spiritual decline has already begun. Cluny had grown too big; the abbey was unwieldy and inelastic; there was no scope for initiative and it passed the powers of a single ruler to keep the machine in function. Moreover, the community was feeling the weakening effect of wealth and the beginning of indiscipline. It was at this very moment, in 1098, that a new and dynamic monastic idea took shape a hundred miles away at Cîteaux, where a simple, austere, solitary, hard-working ideal, with a literal and strict interpretation of the Rule, set itself up against the more indulgent customs of Cluny. Cîteaux, after a difficult beginning, was launched upon an era of expansion and fame by the arrival of the young Bernard in 1112, and soon began, first by example and then by propaganda, to challenge Cluny's way of life, while at the same time it attracted the desirable recruits who twenty years earlier would have become Cluniac monks. While this was happening, the aged abbot Hugh died and was succeeded by Pons, an enigmatic figure, who after an undistinguished rule of a dozen years became a centre of broils and intrigues which led to his forced resignation in 1122. He was succeeded by an estimable monk, well on in years, Hugh II, who died within a few weeks. It was at this moment of crisis that the choice of the community fell upon a young prior of a dependent house, Peter, then some thirty years old.

<sup>1</sup> For this, see the long series of articles in *Speculum* by Dr. K. J. Conant, in which he gives an account of the excavations undertaken by him at Cluny for the Medieval Academy of America. The final article, containing a list of all the previous ones, is in *Speculum* xxix (Jan. 1954), No. 1, 1-44.

Peter, the ninth abbot of Cluny, came to be one of the most influential men in the monastic life of his day, and is as a personality one of the most striking even of that age so rich in notable men. He was an Auvergnat, born about 1092 into a noble family that later took the territorial name of Montboissier. Peter was the seventh son, named, as the family story had it, before his birth by abbot Hugh of Cluny at a meeting with his mother.<sup>1</sup> Of his six brothers one became archbishop of Lyons, another abbot of Vézelay, a third abbot of Chaise-Dieu, and a fourth prior of Cluny and abbot of Mâcon. His father was a devout knight who died clothed with the monastic habit; whereupon his mother Raingarde became a nun at the Cluniac nunnery of Marcigny. She was a woman of remarkable character and clearly, like Bernard's mother, was a moulding force in her son's life. She was made cellarer and became a second mother of her large community; she lived twenty years as a nun, to see her son become abbot of Cluny and her own spiritual father. News of her death came to Peter he tells us, as a sudden blow between the eyes from a heavy beam, and in a long letter to his brothers, he gives us many details of her life.<sup>2</sup>

The boy Peter was dedicated as a child to the monastic life by his parents and given a good literary education in the Cluniac priory of Sauxillanges. He was professed by St. Hugh in 1109. Cluny had a technique by which young monks who combined promise with noble birth were "hand-picked" or "groomed" for high office, and the system seems to have continued even under the unsatisfactory abbot Pons. Peter was made claustral prior of Vézelay abbey, and in 1120 conventual prior (i.e. ruling prior) of Domène, near Grenoble, and must have made his mark in both positions, for as has been seen he attracted the electors at Cluny in 1122, after their previous choice of a sedate elder had disappointed their hopes. It was often the way of that great abbey to pass over tried experience in favour of youthful promise

<sup>1</sup> Most of our information regarding Peter's life, apart from references in his own works and those of St. Bernard and his other correspondents, is derived from two lives, of which the longer and better is by a disciple, Ralph, printed in Migne, *P.L.* vol. 189, cols. 15-42. For the meeting between his mother and St. Hugh see *ibid.*, col. 17. The abbey of Cluny was dedicated to St. Peter.

<sup>2</sup> *Ep.* ii. 17, cols. 208-228.

when choosing an abbot. The policy had proved its worth brilliantly with Odo, Odilo and Hugh ; it was to do so now again for the last time.

Peter took command at a very difficult moment. Cluny, during the long reign of Hugh, had begun to show signs of being overgrown and unmanageable. A blow, as yet not fully felt, had been struck at its spiritual hegemony by the foundation of Cîteaux, to be followed so soon by that of the kindred Savigny and Prémontré. Finally, the whole fabric, spiritual and economical, had been rocked by the maladministration of Pons, and Peter had been only a few months in the saddle when Bernard fired the first devastating round in the long warfare between the white monks and the black.<sup>1</sup> Outwardly, however, and in a way difficult for the imagination of today to capture, Cluny was still in pride of place. The abbey had recently given a series of popes to the Church, and the high places of the Curia were full of its sons. The vast basilica, rebuilt recently with unparalleled magnificence, was shortly (in 1132) to be consecrated by Innocent II. The community, some 300 strong, was to grow to 400 under Peter's rule, and the number of dependencies was to rise to 2,000.

The young abbot was physically strong ; he was by temper energetic and buoyant ; and he was intelligent, amiable and affectionate ; eager to understand and to unite warring interests. He was an aristocrat, like Bernard, and command came easy to him, but he was without a trace of vanity or intolerance, and his multitudinous letters remain to bear out the witness of contemporaries that he was all things to all men, and wished to rule by love and understanding rather than by fear or regulations. He came to his task with a love of Cluny and a loyalty to its best traditions, and he remained energetic in this service, and yet receptive of all higher influences, to the end.

The Cluniac body, vast as it was, had some of the characteristics of an army, held together by decrees and discipline, and with a strong *esprit de corps*. The abbot was constantly on the move, visiting key points on the farflung network, professing new members, appointing priors, visiting new foundations, and keeping in constant touch with Rome. Peter was six times in

<sup>1</sup> Bernard, *ep.* 1 in Migne, *P.L.* vol. 182.

Italy, twice in England (where his presence fluttered the doves in patriotic abbeys which were shy of continental influence)<sup>1</sup> and twice, for long visits, in Spain. In the papal schism of 1130 he was decisive in support of Innocent II, whose cause was so vehemently adopted by St. Bernard, and he was subsequently used by the pope and his successors on more than one occasion. His significance in ecclesiastical politics might have been still greater, had not all other agents been thrown into the shade by the dazzling prestige of the abbot of Clairvaux.

Besides his constant activity as the effective head and sole representative of the Cluniac body, Peter found time to develop his talents as a theologian and patron of learning. He is indeed an exception—one of the very rare exceptions—to the remarkable judgement that historians must pass upon Cluny, that neither at the mother abbey nor throughout her great family was any literary or intellectual work of note produced. This was attributed by contemporaries to the breathless round of liturgical observance, which left neither time nor spirit for any kind of mental exertion. Peter, as abbot, was exempt from the daily round at Cluny, but it is remarkable that a man of affairs always on the move should have found so much time for writing. Besides his letters of business and friendship, to which we shall return, he wrote long doctrinal letters on the divinity of Christ and on the attributes of His Mother, in which he shows a candour and a preference for the literal interpretation of Scripture rare in his age.<sup>2</sup> He also wrote on the sacraments and three long pieces of controversy, one against the heretic Pierre de Bruys, defending baptism and the Eucharist, another against the Jews—one of the longest of the many pieces of controversy in a genre popular at the time—and the third against the Saracens, with whom he had come into contact, at least by hearsay, in Spain.<sup>3</sup> Another and more remarkable result of his Spanish experiences was the organization of a team of scholars, including the well known Hermann of Dalmatia—"Hermann the German"—and the Englishman Robert of Chester, to translate the Koran—not,

<sup>1</sup> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. C. Plummer, s.a. 1130 [E text].

<sup>2</sup> Peter's *Epistola ad Petrum de Joanne*, P.L. vol. 189, cols. 487-508.

<sup>3</sup> The three treatises are *ibid.* cols. 507 ff.

of course, for the study of comparative religion, but solely for controversial purposes.

As a background to all these activities there remained the constant burden of Cluny and its order. The vagaries of ex-abbot Pons, who in 1125 arrived with an armed force and endeavoured, in current jargon, to "stage a come-back", had shaken the mother abbey economically as well as spiritually, and a further blow was delivered to the economy in 1132, when the Pope freed the growing order of Cîteaux from the obligation of paying tithe, thus depriving Cluny of a considerable fraction of its revenue. In addition, the growth of the new orders and the exuberant propaganda of Bernard not only constituted a severe competition in what may be called the monastic market, but were of their very nature a challenge to the Cluniac ideal. We shall consider this more fully in a moment, but it is worth noting here that from c. 1132 onwards Peter was fully occupied on both the foreign and domestic front, in finding an answer to Bernard on the one hand, and setting his own house in order on the other. Sorrows multiplied upon him as he grew older. The communal movement gave trouble to Cluny itself and to many of the daughter-houses. The great abbey, overgrown and run by ancient machinery, fell deeply into debt, largely through lack of careful administration on the lowest levels, and was only saved from complete bankruptcy and a standstill by funds supplied by its old alumnus, the millionaire bishop of Winchester, Henry of Blois, who added to his benefactions in 1154 by residing as an exile in the abbey, where he carried the whole of the running costs of every kind for a year and used his unique competence as a financier to get some sort of order into the monastic economy. At the same time certain branches of the Cluniac family, notably in England and Italy, were growing restive under the strict paternal government from abroad. Finally, and most disastrous of all, the morale and discipline of Cluny itself and its immediate dependants were on the decline, and Peter, from at least 1132 onwards, was engaged in a series of attempts, by means of general assemblies and special regulations, to restore old standards and to graft upon the old monastic trunk some, at least, of the new branches that were bearing fruit in the world around him. As

we shall see, the tone of his utterances seems at times to hint that he was fighting a losing battle. Nevertheless, Peter never lost heart, nor did he lose his trust in Cluny, and one of his last works was his treatise *De miraculis*, which grew out of an account he wrote of his sometime prior and lieutenant Mathew, later cardinal bishop of Albano, and developed into a series of edifying and miraculous lives of Cluniac monks in his day.<sup>1</sup>

Peter the Venerable is a representative of a short but illustrious phase of medieval culture, the literary renaissance of the century from 1050 to 1150. During that century, or rather from c. 1000 to 1120, the education universally given in every religious house and cathedral school was a literary one, based on a fair selection of the Latin classics and patristic writings, and resulting in a facility of self-expression and what may broadly be called a humane attitude to relationship with others. Before that epoch, letter writing, when not simply administrative, had been a scholarly *tour de force*; after that epoch, it became once more a purely practical accomplishment. During Peter's lifetime, on the other hand, communication with others was, as it had been in the days of Pliny and was again to be in those of Petrarch, the interchange of ideas by men of breeding writing to their equals. The men of the early twelfth century were well aware of this. They took pains over their letters; they preserved copies; they even published their own letters among their friends during their lifetime. As is well known, Bernard's secretary and biographer, Geoffrey of Auxerre, collected the saint's letters, established their order, and published them (surely with Bernard's permission) some eight years before their author's death. There is clear manuscript evidence that Peter's letters were collected and published (in the sense that they were copied and circulated in book form) during his lifetime or very soon after his death by his secretary, Peter of Poitiers, and there is evidence that he himself "revised for publication" the duplicates or drafts of his letters that he or his secretaries had kept by them. One might suppose that this would make the letters dull literary exercises, or at least impersonal treatises; both in the ancient and modern

<sup>1</sup> Peter's *Epistola ad Petrum de Joanne*, *P.L.*, vol. 189, cols. 851-954.



worlds letter-collections of this insipid kind exist. In the twelfth century the prospect of publication carried with it no such inhibition. One can, indeed, think of few letters better calculated to give occasion for an action of libel than some of Bernard's more characteristic effusions, and although Peter was by temperament more restrained and impartial, many of his letters have a personal character that would in many epochs have made publication unconventional, if not impossible. The characteristic of Peter's letters is not, however, their vehemence or their variety. It is the spacious ease with which the abbot of Cluny writes as a friend to friends, one had almost said, as one educated gentleman to another. There is no display of authority, no sense of condescension ; rather, there is evidence of intimacy, of friendship, of equality. At the same time, it must be admitted that Peter as a letter writer is far behind the greatest. There is none of the electric force, the siren voice, of Bernard, still less the searing, blasting flame of his invective ; there is not the persuasive, affectionate, personal appeal of Anselm. When Peter writes <sup>1</sup> to his nieces Margaret and Pontia, who have heard of his recent illness and have told him what he ought to take for it, his reply lacks lightness of touch, and as we read the long quotations from the fathers and the exhortations to the young nuns to follow the example of their late grandmother, we cannot help feeling that for once, at least, Peter has missed an opportunity. But if he fails to reach the first rank, he never becomes merely conventional or artificial.

Of all the activities of Peter the Venerable, the most significant for the historian, and the most interesting and revealing to the biographer, is his reaction to the challenge made by the Cistercians and their champion St. Bernard to the traditional Benedictine life of which Cluny was the principal and in some sense the official exponent. Cîteaux had begun in solitude and obscurity, but once she had begun to multiply and spread, some sort of clash was inevitable. The white monks, whatever their original aim or desire, were in fact a protest, a challenge, to the black monks. Both followed the Rule of St. Benedict, but the

<sup>1</sup> Peter's *Epistola ad Petrum de Joanne*, P.L., vol. 189, vi. 39.

Cistercians followed it literally, whereas the Cluniacs had tempered it and followed it modified by customs of all kinds. It was inevitable that the Cistercians should regard the Cluniacs as degenerate, and should be regarded by them in turn as pharisaical. Even before Peter became abbot, Bernard had come into personal collision with Cluny when his cousin Robert was enticed thither from Clairvaux. With this episode, however, Peter had had no connection, and when first we find him writing to Bernard it is on large questions of principle.<sup>1</sup> He had not yet met the abbot of Clairvaux, but had become familiar with the usual Cistercian criticisms of Cluny and wrote to deprecate controversy. His theme is that the Cluniacs put charity before the law, if so they can save more souls, and that this is more in accord with the true monastic and evangelical spirit than a rigid severity.

Almost at the same moment, it would seem, Bernard launched his celebrated defence of Cîteaux, the Apology to William of St. Thierry, which modern criticism has separated into two parts; the original defence, and the spirited, not to say violent, attack on Cluniac abuses and luxury.<sup>2</sup> Like his earlier letter to his cousin Robert, this was not directed to Peter's address, and the abbot of Cluny never specifically alludes to it, though it is clear that he had read it. Meanwhile he and Bernard met, and it is the measure of the greatness of both that each recognized the other's sincerity. Henceforward they write as friends. To us it may seem that the magnanimity was on Bernard's side—the saint and the reformer acknowledging the good intentions of the conservative—but at the time it must have seemed a signal instance of humility and good will that the autocrat of the wealthiest and most distinguished body in Christendom should join the ranks of the admirers of the newly arrived abbot who had handled the traditional monks and their ideals so roughly.

<sup>1</sup> Peter's *Epistola ad Petrum de Joanne*, *P.L.*, vol. 189, i. 28. The stages of this long episode have often been retailed, e.g. by E. Vacandard, *Vie de S. Bernard*. For a summary account with references to sources see the present writer's *Cistercians and Cluniacs* (a lecture printed by the Oxford University Press, 1955); he is contributing an article on the reforming statutes of Peter to the centenary volume referred to in note 2, p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard's *Apology* is in *P.L.*, vol. 182, cols. 895-918.

Indeed, Peter did more than admire Bernard ; he imitated him. Whereas in their first exchanges he fought the abbot of Clairvaux point by point, he came later not by word only but also by deed to introduce into his own family some of the Cistercian reforms—a less luxurious diet, simpler clothing and even that shibboleth, manual work. It is significant, and also amusing, to find Peter, in a letter to his priors, borrowing as much as he can of Bernard's style in declaiming against the rich fare of the Cluniacs.<sup>1</sup> As the years passed the friendship of the two great abbots deepened. Bernard was not a restful bedfellow ; he was liable to fly off the handle (as the phrase goes) without any warning ; and the affairs of the Cistercian tithes and of the Langres election, when Bernard brought his whirlwind tactics to bear upon an apparently respectable Cluniac,<sup>2</sup> would have brought reprisals from any ordinary prelate. Peter remained unmoved, and when the time came gently put his case, setting Bernard's friendship above any quick success. He was rewarded with Bernard's respect and admiration ; indeed it is to the abbot of Clairvaux that Peter owes the surname by which he is known in history.<sup>3</sup> For his part, he declared with sincerity that if he could find it in his conscience to leave his post, he would choose to enter the community at Clairvaux as one of Bernard's sons.<sup>4</sup> Here again we do not perhaps fully realize what such an admission meant when coming from the head of a vast and proud family. Bernard's feeling is best expressed in a letter of c. 1150,<sup>5</sup> where he addresses the abbot of Cluny as his most reverend father and most dear friend, and declares that his spirit is knit to Peter's, and that equality of love makes of unequal personalities two equal souls. Peter replied, disclaiming the title of father but welcoming that of friend.<sup>6</sup> Both men indeed had a genius for friendship ; in this instance Peter was certainly the one to gain most.

The abbot of Cluny was the great peacemaker of his age, and

<sup>1</sup> *Ep.* vi. 15, col. 418.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. G. Constable discusses the Langres election in an article as yet unpublished.

<sup>3</sup> Bernard, *ep.* 282 (*P.L.* vol. 182, col. 489).

<sup>4</sup> *Ep.* vi. 29.

<sup>5</sup> Printed among Peter's letters, *ep.* vi. 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ep.* vi. 3.

the most notable exercise of his gift was in the reconciliation of Abélard with authority and with St. Bernard. Abélard, seeing condemnation near at the council of Sens in 1140, when the bishops had been lashed into action by the abbot of Clairvaux in his most vehement vein, had appealed to Rome, only to be condemned in his absence. An ageing man, broken in spirit and bitter in heart, he set out for Rome, preceded, had he known it, by a broadside of letters from St. Bernard that would have galvanized the Seven Sleepers into action. On his way, which passed near Cluny, he fell in with Peter. The abbot poured oil and wine into his wounds, and at first encouraged him to proceed to Rome. Then, realizing that his cause was lost, he persuaded him to submit and ask for forgiveness ; he himself wrote to the Pope on his behalf. Abélard took his advice, grudgingly but sufficiently, and Peter then crowned his work by bringing about a meeting with Bernard, to which the saint, who never harboured ill-will, no doubt brought all his consummate charm and capacity for friendship. Then Peter persuaded Abélard to join his monastic family at Cluny, where he sheltered and cared for him till his death a few years later. It was an act of love well accomplished. What renders it more memorable still, however, is the sequel. A few days or weeks after Abélard's death, abbot Peter took it upon himself to make the circumstances known to Héloïse, abbess of the Paraclete convent, and the letter in which he did so is one of the most remarkable documents in the history of religious sentiment in the twelfth century.<sup>1</sup> Héloïse had in the past sent complimentary presents to the abbot of Cluny ; she now wrote to him, presumably for news of Abélard's last days. Peter, after excusing himself for a delay caused by pressure of engagements, embarks upon a long letter which must have helped to precipitate another congestion of duties. His opening is an excellent example of his courtesy :

“ My regard for you (he writes) is nothing new ; it is, as I remember well, of old standing. For when I was still a boy and had not yet attained to full manhood, your reputation, I will not say as yet for devotion, but for intellectual interests, had reached me. I heard in those days that a woman, although still

<sup>1</sup> *Ep.* iv. 21.

caught in the toils of this world, was giving all her care to the pursuit of letters and the study of philosophy, and could be drawn from this by no worldly trifles or delights. At this time, when few men could be found so industrious, you had surpassed all women, and almost all men."

After this auspicious beginning Peter wanders somewhat, but after a page or two expresses his wish that Héloïse had given herself to the Cluniac nunnery of Marcigny, where his own mother had taken the veil. This was not to be, but it had been granted him to receive at Cluny "your own master, Peter, that servant and true philosopher of Christ, always worthy to be named with honour, whom divine providence sent to Cluny that he might bring in his person a treasure more precious than gold and the topaz". He then goes on to describe Abélard's edifying manner of life, his last illness, and his death, and ends with a long and involved, but extremely eloquent passage; "Him then" (he writes) "revered and most dear sister in Christ, to whom thou didst cling with a God-given charity far stronger than your first earthly love—him, with whom and under whom you served the Lord for so long—him, I say, Christ Himself in thy stead, as another Héloïse, cherishes in His bosom, and keeps him to restore him to thee at the coming of the Lord, at the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God."

Sympathy, we may well feel, and candid acceptance of the past, could not well have gone further.

Peter followed his letter with a visit to the Paraclete, when he offered Mass for the nuns and preached in their chapter. The occasion was no ordinary one, for he brought with him the master's body, to be buried in the nuns' church. Héloïse, who still had a mother's love, followed up the visit by a request that Peter would find a prebend for her son Astrolabe at Paris or elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> and the series of letters ends with Peter's reply, in which he accepts Héloïse's son as if he were his own, and promises to do his best for a benefice, though warning her that bishops are tough customers when it comes to parting with rich prebends.<sup>2</sup>

Peter died, long-lived but still at the height of his powers, in

<sup>1</sup> *Ep.* vi. 21.

<sup>2</sup> *Ep.* vi. 22.

the last days of 1156, with his heritage of Cluny still intact. His death, as has been said, marked an epoch. He had spent his life in the service of an ideal that had become outmoded or at least outbidden, and of a society that had ceased to lead its age. He had arrested the decline, and the lustre of his personality had done much to conceal what could not be remedied. When he went, the void could not be filled. Cluny was never again the glory of the monastic world. After recording Peter's death, the Maurist annalist felt constrained to add "from this moment that venerable body lost its ancient splendour, which it was never again to recover in its entirety".<sup>4</sup>

With Peter went also a very noble type of monk and abbot. We in England, brought up to know Abbot Samson of Bury, and the feudal abbots of the twelfth century, dim medieval figures for the most part, do well to realize that there were in that age men of the mould of Peter, humane, wise, charitable, of the type familiar in later French history—the family of François de Sales, of Fénelon, of Blossius—the aristocrat who is also a spiritual father, a man of wide education, of statesmanlike ability and of a deep piety that borders upon sanctity. Peter was never officially canonized, and although his contemporary biographer retails incidents in his life that might be considered near-miracles, neither these, nor the record of his actions, nor the witness of his letters, ever convey to us the authentic touch of sanctity, the direct vision, the imperative call, the glimpse of a life that re-enacts in its own idiom the life of Christ. His sons of Cluny, however, made something of a cult of his memory; they did not succeed in prefixing to his name the title of saint, but they had another word of honour at their disposal, and the Maurists of the seventeenth century perpetuated the epithet by which he will always be known to history.

<sup>1</sup> *Annales O.S.B.*, ed. Lucca 1745, vi. 528-9. "Quo ex tempore sacra illa congregatio priscum splendorem, haud scio an aliquando ex integro rediturum, amisit." The sentence is presumably by Martène, who produced the volume after the death of Mabillon.