

Here begins the life and passion of saint William the martyr of Norwich.

To father and lord, of reverend sanctity, William., Bishop of Norwich by the grace of God, **I**, Thomas of Monmouth, the lowliest of his monks, send greetings and the due service of obedience. Sharing, **as I do**, in the love that all have for you, **and** attached with a special devotion of my own, I have striven to offer and share with your **Fatherliness** this little work, desiring your opinion of it, even **though** as I am anxious about it. And since Rome itself has known your eloquence, and Gaul has discovered it too, and the whole of England has often also realized it, nobody would therefore wonder that I should submit myself to the wise judgement of your **consideration**, and be led **by your teaching rod**. Accordingly, let those across the sea as well as our English folk, know that many rivers of your eloquence have come forth (**1rb**), and what expert knowledge you have in both divine and secular studies, and your fluency of speech. Therefore, as I set out to compose the miracles of the glorious martyr William, I humbly implore the love of your **Fatherliness**, the favour of your love, as well as the grace of your kindness, so that you grant me perfect pardon for my imperfect presumption. Since I am, indeed, but slow in skill, and ignorant in eloquence, yet compelled by love for the blessed martyr – since I cannot remain silent about his virtues – so in the manner of babbling children, who freely set out to do tasks they cannot as yet adequately complete, I too have attempted in a way to make my mutterings. I do not, however, doubt that in the view of

the all-powerful and pious Lord, the accomplishment of a work is less appreciated (**regarded, valued**) than the simple motive of pious intention. Hence, I forewarn you the reader - if indeed someone, seized by love, wishes to read this - that he seek in the sequence of this work not eloquence, nor the wit of style, but rather answer on my behalf those who envy or detract, so that some favour be granted to this (**new**) novel work. I say this, not in order to praise my effort insolently (**unfairly**) as if under a cloud of excuses, but rather in order to invite those who are interested in something new to read it, **1va** aware of the hard labour it has involved. Travellers are sometimes grateful to have a drizzle of water from a little trickling spring when they are thirsty, rather than a gushing flow of a fountain whose plenty they have not found at a time of need. Not to mention those wild-flowers which are as pleasing to those who delight in gardens. And the words of Virgil are often true: 'White privets fall, dark hyacinths are culled'.<sup>1</sup> The subject matter of a writer sometimes also justifies him, when a base multitude of words may displease, but the underlying true sense will give no offence. I have preferred, therefore, to forego my own modesty, rather than let so many and such **great** virtues of the holy martyr William grow old in oblivion and or in the rust of disregard. And since fraternal love has

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<sup>1</sup> 'alba ligustra cadunt, vicia nigra leguntur'; Virgil, *Eclogue* II, xviii.:  
'Trust not too much to colour, beautiful boy;  
White privets fall, dark hyacinths are culled'.  
'O formose puer, numquam ne crede colori!  
alba ligustra cadunt, vicia nigra leguntur'.

commanded me to hammer out the Passion and miracles on my anvil, I undertake to comply with the wish of believers, in an effort not so much to be elegant but to be truthful. And so like the ass who is neither sufficiently strong to bear the load, nor able to through it off, **1vb** I submit myself to so pious a labour. I would have preferred that a more able carrier of this load **be found**, but this is not the case, so I prefer myself to no one **at all**. And so, by so boldly setting forth, I confess myself guilty of presumption, but let the fraternal pressure be my excuse. For it is not a presumption to make known to those who wish to know the lives and virtues of saints. ‘Keeping the King’s secret is of course a good thing, to make the works of God known is an honourable thing’,<sup>2</sup> and it is the duty of each and every Christian. If, however, someone considers **that I have** included in this little book anything that appears to be untrue, let that person not, indeed, impute the sin of lying to us, because we have striven to write down nothing but what we have seen, or what we have learnt as carried by common knowledge; **all** in order to inform the devotion of those alive and generations to come. And lest anyone assume that for reasons of affection I have provided something that is lacking in faith (**truth**) - seeing that it would be better to say nothing at all, rather than to put forward falsehood in

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<sup>2</sup> Paraphrasing Matthew 12, 36: ‘dico autem vobis quoniam omne verbum otiosum quod locuti fuerint homines reddent rationem de eo in die iudicii’; ‘But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment’. See also Hebrew 13,17.

order to mislead - since we are not unfamiliar with we 'shall have to render an account for every word'. It is certainly better to restrain the tongue in silence, than to narrate falsehood to the detriment of the soul. Because, indeed, 'And the mouth that belieeth, killeth the soul',<sup>3</sup> God forbid that I should lie in sacred matters, or **defile God's word**.

But since there is so much proof of truth in our time, why should I have to suppress the truth or to concoct lies? And so I should be called by spiteful people neither a forger nor a compiler of lies, just as if, as the blessed Jerome put it: 'I was not removing errors, but begetting fictions'.<sup>4</sup> Let the scorpion stop rising up against us, poised (**arched**) to injure us (**arcuato vulnere**); and let the poisoned tongue cease picking away at the holy work. Truly, as often as some rival of our labour has raised his mean head against us, may your authority, bishop and venerable protector, look over our little work's humility. For there are some who, led by a corrupt spirit, as they refuse to believe the written truth, also hold back from that which has been witnessed by many. They scorn even those things which have been truly seen as if they were fictions, not having in faith what the apostle Thomas

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<sup>3</sup> 'Os quod mentitur occidit animam'; Vulgate Sapientia 1,11: 'Os autem quod mentitor occidit animam'.

<sup>4</sup> 'errores non auferam sed fictitia seram'. As yet to be found, perhaps part of the vast Pseudo-Jerome corpus, which is often associated with Jewish-Christian polemic, see A. Saltman, 'Rabanus Maurus and the Pseudo-Hieronymian *Questiones Hebraicae in Libros Regum et Paralipomenon*', *Harvard Theological Review* 66(1973), pp.43-75.

felt in his heart, ‘Except I shall see I will not believe’.<sup>5</sup> But in the Lord’s words I say, ‘blessed are they that have not seen and have believed’.<sup>6</sup>

Whoever you are of these kinds of people, listen carefully to this. Because although not everything can be known by everyone, still different things can be known by different people, and some things are known, yet you are unable to hear or see them yourself. Manifest valour always has its rivals, ‘and it is the tops of the mountains that the lightning strikes’.<sup>7</sup> From there Pliny too: ‘Many wish to detract from the very best, rather than to learn from them’.<sup>8</sup> Beware, therefore, disparager, lest while you detract from those things that are certain, you drag yourself into the error of blasphemy. The diligent reader will pay careful attention to all these things, lest both our and his efforts be wasted. Let each choose what he wishes, and prove himself to

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<sup>5</sup> ‘nisi uidero non credam’; Vulgate John 20, 25: dixerunt ergo ei alii discipuli vidimus Dominum ille autem dixit eis nisi uidero in manibus eius figuram clavorum et mittam digitum meum in locum clavorum et mittam manum meam in latus eius non credam.

<sup>6</sup> ‘beati qui non viderunt sed crediderunt’; Vulgate John 20,29: dicit ei Iesus quia vidisti me credidisti beati qui non viderunt et crediderunt.

<sup>7</sup> ‘feriuntque summos fulgura montes’; Horace, *Carmina* II, X:

Saepius ventis agitatur ingens  
Pinus, et celsae gravitore casu  
Decidunt terres feriuntque summos  
Fulgura montes’

The big pine is more shaken by the winds:

The higher a tower, the heavier is the fall thereof,

And it is the tops of the mountains that the lightning strikes.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Optima queque uideri uolunt obtrectare plerique quam discere’; I have not founds this in Pliny the Younger’s works, nor yet in Pliny the Elder. It sounds rather like Apuleius *Florida* IX: ‘hoc quoque genus invenitur, qui meliores obtrectare malint quam imitari’.

be exacting rather than malicious. In God's mansion, as you see, both a gold vessel and an earthenware pot **have their uses**. Finally, I beg of you, reader double indulgence: in case I am wounding your ears with grammatical faults and a poverty of words, and in case the overflowing page causes exhaustion. But do not disdain to examine what Christ himself did not: while he exalts his saints, he encourages us with glorious examples. And lest the reader's diligence weaken due to the **sheer** size of this book, we have taken care to divide it into seven sections of moderate size, as if breathing in intervals the reader's devotion may never stop moving readily from earlier portions to later ones. First, accordingly, breaking it into four parts, I have described the sacred childhood of the holy martyr, his venerable Passion, the finding of the sacred body exposed in the woods while lying there under the heavens, and have added the first translation from the wood into the city. I have divided the second little book into three parts: I have offered a fitting account of his virtues made public by miraculous signs, and next I exposed the attack of the Christ-killing Jews; and lastly, put the dispute (**court case**) between the Christians and the Jews of Norwich in front of King Stephen into the form of an oration. Thirdly, in twofold division, I have described the second translation of the holy body and the wondrous exaltation of his tomb, and in the same manner I added the recovery of a light, as well as some other related miracles. Fourthly, making a threefold division, several miracles I have set forth first, the recovery of the stolen carpet, next the

wondrous discovery of the holy teeth, and in the third place, the amazing finding of the fountainhead under the roots of a tree where he once lay exposed. And in the fifth book, the third translation is recounted, numerous miracles follow, and the death of the holy martyr's mother is foretold in a remarkable vision. In the sixth, as you see, in the year 1154, the fourth translation is described, which was attended by an abundance of miracles. The seventh book is wholly assigned to miracles, and brings the work to an end.

The pious reader should pay attention, therefore, to the truth of the events, arranged as a summary in stages, and by skimming through the whole in this short summary will know where to find what he most desires. But now, since we have exceeded the boundary of a prologue, we bring it to an end, having run its course. At its end, **3ra** venerable bishop William, I entreat your far-seeing power of discernment, that you study this little book, which I commit to your consideration, with diligent care, pruning anything that is superfluous, correcting anything wrong, and as to the rest, if there is anything worthy, allowing it to remain in place. Farewell, most holy father.

The prologue ends.