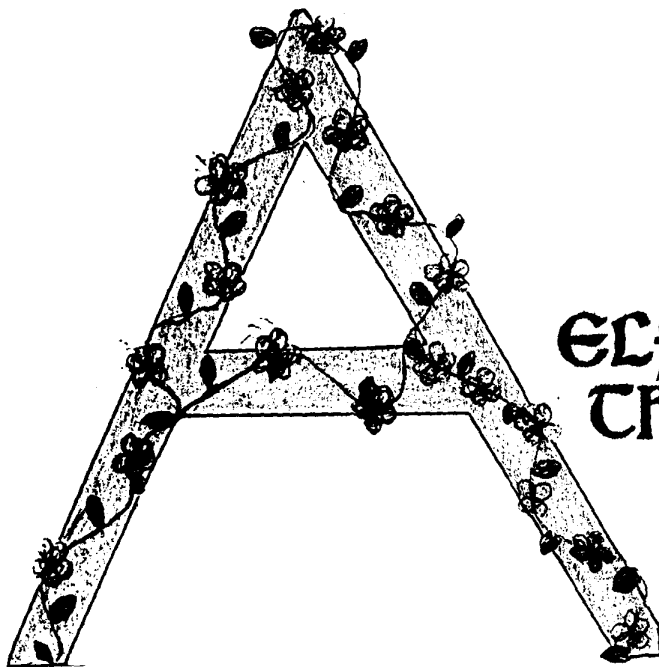


GOOD HISTORY

Journal
of the
Eynsham Junior
History Group



ELFRIC,
THE TEACHER

Special Issue No 4
Summer 2005

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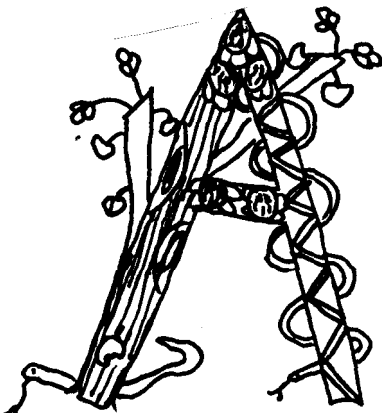
Special Edition No 4

AELFRIC, THE TEACHER

In this issue we would like to share the work which we have done on Aelfric the first Abbot of Eynsham. He particularly appealed to us because he was a teacher and as one member of the group said "We know all about teachers!"

During our study of Aelfric we presented a play that was based on how we imagined Aelfric might have taught some of the novices at the Abbey. We tried to show that Aelfric was teaching his pupils to read in both English and Latin at the same time. We tried the Latin but did not attempt Anglo-Saxon English. We took his conversation with the Fisherman from the Colloquy and adapted it slightly, for our purposes. We have included a scene from the play in this study as well as the reaction of one of the cast. We have also included some other parts of the Colloquy and some information we gathered from Aelfric's *Letter to the Monks of Eynsham*.

Thanks to Elizabeth Gonnal, Kushall Nayee, Marcus Li and Sabrina Wood for providing initial letters and to Rachel Marks for the Title Page initial letter.



ELFRIC

first Abbot of Eynsham

1005-10

Aelfric probably came from a parish near Winchester where there is the Cathedral and at the time of Aelfric, a Benedictine Abbey. By the time Aelfric joined the abbey it was under the rule of Aethelwold. Aethelwold was a reforming clergyman who was a follower of the Benedictine Rule. When he first went to Winchester he was shocked by the behaviour of the monks. Writing 40 years later Aelfric described them as drunken and riotous with wives and children!

To put the House in order Aethelwold applied to King Edgar who sent Wulfstan, one of his thanes. A thane was a man of the king's household with military responsibilities. The wicked monks were turned out and replaced by those who followed the order of Benedict more correctly. They were from the Abbey of Abingdon.

Aethelwold saw in Aelfric a right-thinking monk and taught him carefully so that he in turn could take on responsibilities. Sometime, when he was about thirty he was sent to Cerne Abbey in Dorset with others so that they could establish the Rule of Benedict in the way Aethelwold wished. It was there that he did most of his writing as well as teaching. Aelfric saw his main purposes as writing to instruct, and teaching. It has been said that he brought to his teaching a combination of gentleness, severity and artistry.

He was very keen that his pupils should know their Latin. They came from English speaking homes and therefore had to work hard to learn a new language. Aelfric did his best to make his learning pleasant. He wrote a basic Latin Grammar on traditional lines as well as a list of Latin/English words, rather like a vocabulary/phrase book. The services the monks attended were in Latin so they needed to be able to follow.

His most famous book the Colloquy, is written in both Latin and Anglo-Saxon English. A colloquy means a conversation and Aelfric's Colloquy consists of conversations between a master and his pupils, taking the role of different tradesmen and involving grammar, syntax [sentence construction, the grammatical arrangement of words in speech or writing] and vocabulary. It also had to be learnt by heart.

Among his other writings, was 'The Lives of the Saints' borrowing on the writings of Augustine, Jerome, Gregory the Great and Bede.

Aelfric was sent to Eynsham to be its first Abbot, when it was given its foundation Charter in 1005. There had been a place of worship in Eynsham for many years but the holy men who had been there had fled from the Vikings when they came up the Thames. Aethelmaer who gave the money for the foundation of the Abbey was a relative of the royal family of the time and he bought and so that the Abbey could have an income from the rents of the lands. As part of his preparation of the monks for the new Abbey, Aelfric wrote them a letter explaining how he had come to be made Abbot over them and what he expected from them, setting out his interpretation of the Benedictine Rule. Although he was serious about the keeping of the Rule, he was not severe. He also implied in his letter that they had it easier than he had had in his day. What's new!

Aelfric died around 1010 when he was about 53 years old. The exact date is not known, but there are no more of his writings after that date.

The Rule of St. Benedict, chapter 73.

'This rule has been written in order that, by practising it in monasteries, we may show that we have attained some degree of virtue and the rudiments of monastic observance Whoever, therefore, thou art that hastenest to thy heavenly country, fulfil first of all by the help of Christ this little Rule for beginners. And then at length, under God's protection, shalt thou attain those loftier heights of wisdom and virtue'.

Some instructions given to the monks of Eynsham by Aelfric

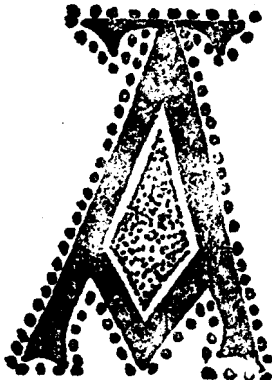
Among very detailed instructions of how the monks should conduct themselves and their adherence to the structure of the rule of Benedict concerning the attendance at services and how they should be conducted, including a note which seemed to reflect things we had learned while studying Thomas Becket and Hugh of Lincoln.

“..... No layman shall have dominion over any monastery [or abbey] where the holy Rule is observed, save the King alone – and even he for the protection of the place, not the exercise of tyranny over it.”

Becket and Hugh were two who stood up to the King, following this instruction.

Aelfric also had concern for the conduct of the abbot and monks outside of the abbey. “. . . the abbot or brothers shall not eat or drink outside the refectory (except for reasons of illness) or with reckless audacity presume to attend feasts held by secular persons.”

[Extracts from *Aelfric's Letter to the Monks of Eynsham* by Christopher A Jones.]



elfric the Teacher — as performed by Eynsham Junior History Group

Scene II. The scene takes place in a room in Eynsham Abbey c. 1005. Two monks are talking together as they wait for the class to begin when Aelfric is teaching five young novices, Lilla, Edwin, Cenred, Saberht and Wilfrid.

Brother Luke: I am glad that we were able to come here with Abbot Aelfric. From these letters he has sent to help us in our life here, I think that I may understand what Benedict intended better now.

Brother David: Yes, he explains things well. I am pleased. However, I wish it was not so cold today. My feet tell me that they wish they were still wearing my fur-lined night shoes.

Bro. Luke: Sh! You must not grumble or you will be punished. Although our life is not harsh we cannot expect too much comfort. They always light a fire for us when we are reading or studying in the winter. As Abbot Aelfric says in his letter, “During the winter period the brothers shall be granted access to a fire, should necessity require it; this shall not be done in the refectory, however. And should the severe cold persist, let them all read and chant together in the

domus. But should the weather be mild, let them all sit together in the cloister.”

Bro. David: I know, but I am also rather tired today. I helped in the infirmary last night and I nearly missed Matins this morning and this Psalm I am studying today is very long.

Bro. Luke: Which one is it?

Bro. David: Psalm 33 – I am not sure I understand the bit about the horse.

Bro. Luke: I wonder how the novices are coping with the hours of prayer and reading of psalms. I feel that some of them find it very difficult to get up at two in the morning even though they went to bed at half-past six the night before.

Bro. David: I am sure they will soon learn the rhythm of the days. I hope they have learned their lessons because the Abbot will be here soon and then they will have to work hard.

Bro. Luke: Yes, he has asked us to stay here today to note what help they may need and to learn from him so that we ourselves may be teachers on the young one day.

Bro. David: Ah, here they come now. They must learn to be quieter. Come in and sit down quietly and wait until Father Abbot comes. He will not be long.

[Aelfric enters]

Bro. Luke: Stand now. Good morning Father Abbot

All: Good morning Father Abbot.

Aelfric: God bless you this morning [All sit]
Now this morning we will just remind ourselves of what we have agreed when I teach you. Lilla, you will begin to read from the Colloquy.

Lilla: Master, we boys ask you to teach us to speak Latin correctly: for we are very backward and speak badly.

Aelfric: What do you want to talk about?

Lilla: What matter what we talk about, so only as the speech is correct and useful, not empty or unseemly?

Aelfric: Are you willing to be birched whilst learning?

Lilla: We would rather be birched and learn, than be ignorant. But we know that you are a kindly man, reluctant to inflict blows on us, unless we force you.

Aelfric: Very well, today we will look at the passage about the Fisherman. But first you will tell me your names in Latin, and you can start Lilla.

Lilla: *Nomen meum Lilla est.* **Edwin:** *Nomen meum Edwin est.*

Cenred: *Nomen meum Cenred est.* **Saberht:** *Nomen meum Saberht est.*

Wilfrid: *Nomen meum Wilfrid est.*

Aelfric: Good, now let us look at the text. I will ask the question and Lilla you will begin to read in Latin. Edwin, you will translate what I say and until I stop you, Wilfrid, you will translate what Lilla reads.

Qualem artem scis tu?

Edwin: What trade do you know?

Lilla: *Ego sum piscator* **Wilfrid:** **I am a fisherman.**

Aelfric: *Quid adquiris de tua ante?*

Edwin: What do you earn from your trade?

Lilla: *Victum et vestitum et pecuniam.*

Wilfrid: Food, clothes and money.

Aelfric: *Quomodo capis pisces?*

Edwin: How do you catch fish?

Lilla *Ascendo nauem et pono retia mea in amne et hamum proicio et sportas, et quicquid ceperint sumo.*

Wilfrid: [He stumbles a little over this bit of translation]. I get into a boat, set my nets in the stream, cast the hooks and sink the baskets, and whatever they catch I take.

Aelfric: So far you have done well. Now let us change the tasks. Edwin you can continue to translate what I read and Cenred you can reply in Latin and Saberht you can translate.

Quid si immundi fuerint pisces?

Edwin: What if the fish are unclean?

Cenred: *Ego proiciam immundos foras, et sumo mihi mundos in escam*



Saberht: I will throw the unclean away and I take the clean for myself to eat.

Aelfric: *Ubi vendis pisces tuos?* **Edwin:** Where do you sell the fish?

Cenred: *In civitate* **Saberht:** In the town

Aelfric: *Quis emit illos?* **Edwin:** Who buys them?

Cenred: *Cives. Non possum tot capere quot possum vendere.*

Saberht: The townsfolk. I cannot catch as many as I could sell.

Aelfric: *Quales pisces capis?* **Edwin:** What fish to you catch?

Cendred: *Anguillas et lucios, menas et capitones, tructas et murenas et qualescumque in amne natant.*

Aelfric: Lilla you translate that

Lilla: Er ... Eels, er ... Pike, ...



Aelfric: As I thought, Lilla you were not concentrating. Come here. You must be punished. It is wrong to let your mind wander when you are in the process of learning. Hold out your hand. [He beats her hand with the birch] Now go back to your seat and try again. Cenred will you read the Latin again.

Cenred: *Anguillas et lucios, menas et capitones, tructas et murenas et qualescumque in amne natant.*

Lilla: Eels, pike, minnows, carp, trout, lampreys and what ever swims in the river.

Aelfric: That is better. Now, we will continue. *Cur non piscaris in mari?*

Edwin: Why don't you catch fish in the sea?

Cenred: *Aliquando facio, sed raro, quia magnum navigium mihi est ad mare.*

[Aelfric points at Lilla again]

Lilla: I do sometimes, but it is rare, because it is a long journey to the sea for me.

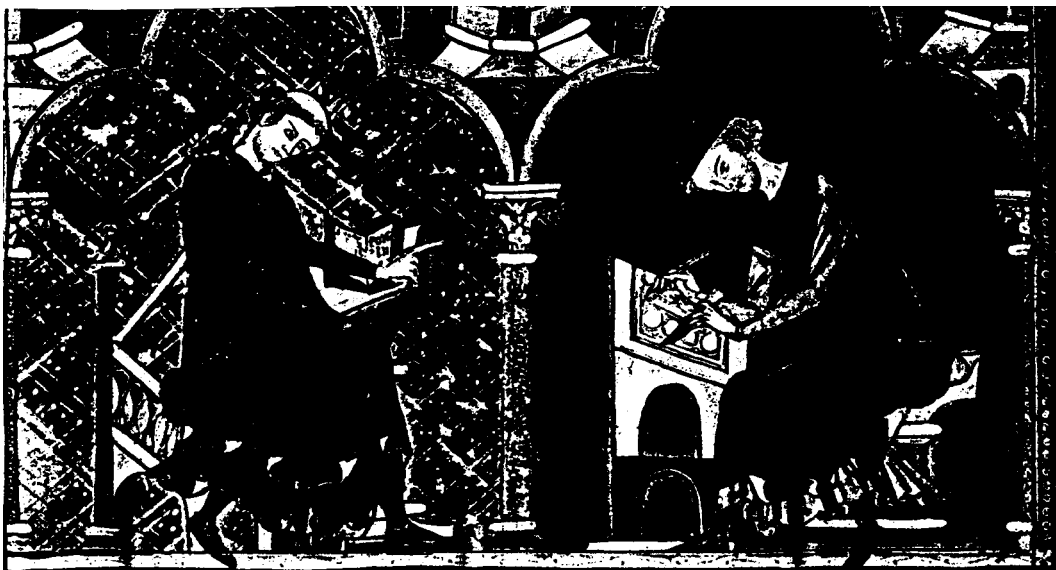
Aelfric: Again better. We will leave the fisherman now and I want you to prepare the lesson on the Fowler for tomorrow. At our last

lesson I asked you to learn Psalm 127 and I trust you have all done so. Edwin you can begin and we will continue along the line. Now!

- Edwin:** Psalm 127 in our Psalter:
Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it:
except the Lord keep the city the watchman waketh but in vain.
- Lilla:** It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep.
- Wilfrid:** Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is his reward.
- Cenred:** As arrows are in the hand of the mighty man; so are children of the youth.
- Saberht:** Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.
- Aelfric:** Good, you have learned well. I trust that your numbering and your writing are also being attended to. If you need help, Brother Luke or Brother David will assist you. I also hope you are attending to the services. Now it is time for us to go to the church for Sext, [Cenred starts to put up his hand] yes Cenred, the service at the sixth hour. Remember study well. I will see you again tomorrow.

THE CAST:

Aelfric, Matthew Marks; **Brother Luke**, Luke Maskell; **Brother David**, David Richardson; **Lilla**, Lily Page; **Edwin**, Elizabeth Gonnal; **Saberht**, **Sabrina Wood**; **Cenred**, Charlotte Quinn; **Wilfrid**, Vivien Hughes.
At the performance, the play was introduced by Abigail Sutherland.



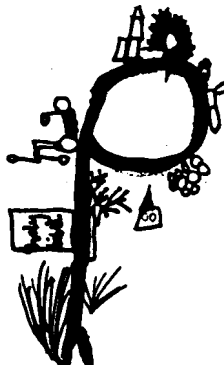
Did Brother Luke and Brother David look like this as they worked in the Scriptorum?

A reaction to taking part in the performance. by Lily Page.

I thought it was great fun and it helped me to understand what would have happened in a monk's school. It also told me how to speak Latin. The character I was playing was a boy called Lilla. It couldn't be a girl because girls didn't get education at that time.

Further extracts from Aelfric's Colloquy

from translations by Lilian Wright a former teacher at Eynsham Primary School, based on those made by William Hassell, which have been revised and expanded by D.S. Richards and the Editor. The Colloquy gives a vivid picture of the life of the novices and the workers on whom the monks depended.



LOUGHMAN

Master: *What do you say, Ploughman. What is your work?*

Ploughman: *O my lord, I work extremely hard I go out at dawn. I drive the oxen to the field and yoke them to the plough. It is extremely hard work. I go out at dawn. I drive the oxen to the field and yoke them to the plough. It is never so rough in winter that I dare stay at home to rest because I fear my master, but with the ploughshare attached to the plough I must plough a whole field or more.*

Master: *Have you someone to work with you?*

Ploughman: *I have a young boy who drives the oxen with a stick and makes himself hoarse with the cold and his shouting.*

Master: *What more do you do in the day?*

Ploughman: *Certainly, I do more. I have to fill the mangers with hay for the oxen, give them water and carry away the dung as well. Oh it is very hard work. It is true, it is hard work and you are not free.*





SHEPHERD

Master: *What do you say, shepherd, do you have any work?*

Shepherd: *Yes, I have. In the early morning I drive my sheep to their pasture and stay with them in the heat and the cold with the dogs, so that no wolf devours them. Then I lead them back again to their fold and milk the ewes twice a day, and make cheese and butter and I am faithful to my lord*

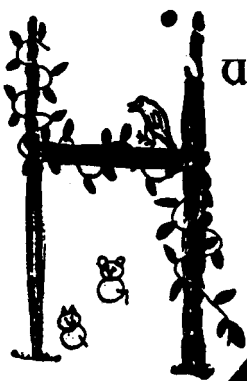


OXHERD

Master: *Oxherd, what do you do?*

Oxherd: *Oh my lord, I have much work When the ploughman unyokes the oxen I lead them to the pasture and I stay all night guarding them against thieves. .Then at first light I hand them back to the ploughman, well pastured and watered*

Master: *Is this one of your fellow workers?* **Oxherd:** *Yes, he is.*



HUNTER



Master *Do you have a skill?*

Hunter: *Yes, I have a skill.*

Master: *What sort of skill?*

Hunter: *I am a hunter.*

Master: *For whom?*

Hunter: *I work for the king.*

Master: *How do you exercise your craft?*

Hunter: *I weave my nets and set them in place and call my dogs to chase the prey into the nets unawares and so the animals are ensnared and I kill them in the net.*

Master: *Can you hunt without a net?* **Hunter:** *I can hunt without a net*

Master: *How?* **Hunter:** *With my swift dogs I can give chase*

Master: *What animals do you mostly catch?*

Hunter: *Deer, boar, roe deer, goats, and hares sometimes.*

Master: *Were you hunting today?*

Hunter: *I am not hunting today because it is Sunday but yesterday I went hunting.*

Master: *What did you catch?* **Hunter:** *I caught two deer and a boar.*

Master: *How did you catch them?*

Hunter: *The deer I caught in the nets and the boar I speared.*

Master: *How did you dare to spear the boar?*

Hunter: *The dogs led it to me and standing facing it I speared it.*

Master: *You are very brave then.*

Hunter: *A hunter ought not to be fearful because many beasts remain in the woods.*

Master: *What do you do with your hunting?*

Hunter: *I give whatever I catch to the king because I am his hunter.*

Master: *What does he give you?*

Hunter: *He clothes me and feeds me as well Sometimes he gives me a horse or an armlet so that I can exercise my skill more happily.*



FOWLER

Master: *What do you say fowler, how do you catch birds?*

Fowler: *In many ways — with nets, with snares, with bird-lime, with whistling, with hawks and with traps.*

Master: *Do you have a hawk?* **Fowler:** *Yes I do.*

Master: *Do you know how to tame them?*

Fowler: *Yes I do. What good would they be if I could not tame them?*

Master: *Can you give me a hawk?*

Fowler: *I will give you one willingly if you will give me a hound.*

Master: *What sort of hawks do you have?*

Fowler: *I have large and small.*

Master: *How do you feed them?*

Fowler: *They feed themselves and me in winter. In spring I take them to the wood to set them free, and I take some chicks for myself in the autumn and tame them.*

Master: *Why do you allow the tame ones to fly away?*

Fowler: *Because I don't want to feed them in the summer because they eat too much.*

Master: *Many feed tame birds over the summer in order that they may have them ready again.*

Fowler: *Yes, they do but I do not want to have so much work with them because I know how to catch others, not just one but many.*

Master: *Give me a large one.*



Master: *What do you say merchant?*

Merchant: *I say that I am useful to the king, the nobles, the rich and all the people.*

Master: *How?*

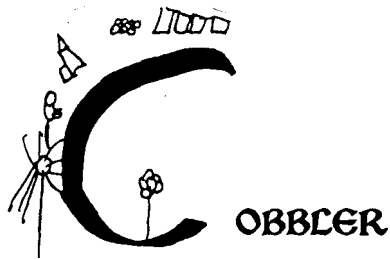
Merchant: *I embark on a ship with my goods and sail over the sea to many parts and sell my goods and buy things, rich precious things which in this land are not produced, venturing in other lands. I bring it to you with great peril on the sea and sometimes I suffer shipwreck with the loss of all my goods barely escaping with my life.*

Master: *What kind of goods do you bring to us?*

Merchant: *Purple garments and silk valuable jewels, gold; various garments and pigments, wine and oil, ivory and brass, tin, sulphur and glass and similar things.*

Master: *Do you want to sell your things here at the same price that you have bought them there?*

Merchant: *No, I don't want to. What then would my labour profit me? On the contrary, I wish to sell here more dearly than I bought them there, that I gain some profit to feed myself, my wife and my sons.*



Master: *You Cobbler, what do you do that is useful for us?*

Cobbler: *My craft is very useful and necessary for you. Master: How?*

Cobbler: *I buy skins and pelts and I prepare them by my skill and from them I make various types of footwear, sandals, shoes, boots; leather bags, bridles, flasks, trappings, bottles, halters, spurs, scrips and purses. Nobody wishes to spend the winter without my craft.*



Master: *Oh Salter, how does your craft help?*

Salter: *My craft helps everyone. None could enjoy meals without my craft.*

Master: *How is that?*

Salter: *How can men enjoy wholesome meat without salt to preserve it. How can you fill a cellar or storeroom. Also all butter and cheese will go bad unless salt is used to keep it.*



Master: *What do you say baker: Is it possible to endure life without you?*

Baker: *You may be able to live without my craft, but not for long. Truly without my craft every table feels empty and without a loaf of bread meat is not appetizing. I encourage the heart of man, I give strength and not even children are willing to refuse me.*



- Master:** *What shall we say of the cook if we lack some of his art?*
- Cook:** *If you expel me from your society you will eat your greens uncooked and your meat raw and without my craft you cannot even have fat.*
- Master:** *We do not care about your craft as it is not necessary for us because we ourselves can cook what has to be cooked and roast whatever has to be roasted*
- Cook:** *If indeed you expel me to do thus, then you will all be cooks and none of you will be master and without my craft you will not eat.*



- Master:** *O monk you said to me "Look I have worked for you to have good companions and useful ones". Who are these?*
- Monk:** *I have smiths; blacksmiths, goldsmiths, silversmiths and coppersmiths; a carpenter and many others of various crafts.*
- Master:** *Do you have any wise counsellors?*
- Monk:** *Certainly I do. How can our congregation be ruled without a council?*
- Master:** *What do you say wise man which amongst these seem to be the most important?*
- Counsellor:** *I say to you, it seems to be that the service of God holds prime position amongst these arts, as is written in the gospel "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you"*
- Master:** *Which seems to you to hold prime position in the secular arts?*
- Counsellor:** *Agriculture, because the ploughman feeds us all*
- Blacksmith:** *Where does the ploughman get his coulter or ploughshare? He doesn't even have a goad without our art. Where does the fisherman get his*

hook or the cobbler his awl or the tailor his needle? Are they not from my work?

Counsellor: *What you say is true for all of us it is more prized to stay with you ploughman than with you blacksmith because the ploughman gives us our daily bread and ale. You, what do you give us in your workshop except iron sparks and the noise of beating hammers and bellows blowing.*

Carpenter: *Who amongst you does not utilise my craft since I make houses for all and different vessels and boats.*

Blacksmith: *O Carpenter why do you speak thus, since you cannot make one hole without my craft.*

Counsellor: *O Companions and good-workmen, let us quickly solve these contentions and let there be peace and concord between you and let each one benefit from the art of the other and let us agree always with the ploughman so we have victuals for ourselves and fodder for our horses. And this advice I give to all workmen that each one should diligently exercise his craft because whoever repudiates his own art, is himself dismissed by that art. Whether you are a priest or a monk or a member of the laity or a soldier do your best in that field and be what you are because it is a great humiliation and shame for a man not to be what he is and what he ought to be.*

Master: *O boys, how does this speech please you?*

Boy: *It pleases us well but you speak very deeply and bring out speech beyond our age. Speak to us in accordance with our intellect in order that we might understand what you are saying.*

Master: *I ask you why you study so diligently?*

Boy: *We do not wish to be like brute animals who know nothing but grass and water.*

Master: *What do you want then?* **Boy:** *We want to be clever.*

Master: *What sort of cleverness. Do you want to be clever or multifarious in your lies, crafty in your speech, artful; deceitful; speaking fairly but thinking wickedly, dedicated to sweet words nurturing deception inwardly, like a whited sepulchre inwardly full of decay?*

Boy: *We do not want to be clever in this way because whoever deceives with pretence is not wise.*

Master: *So in what way do you want to be clever?*

Boy: *We want to be simple without hypocrisy, and wise in order to avoid evil and do good. Up to now, you dispute with us more profoundly than our age can understand but speak to us in our way not so deeply.*

Master: *I'll do as you ask. You boy, what did you do today?*

Boy 2: *I did a lot of things. This night when I heard the bell I got up from my bed and went into the church and I sang the night office with my brothers, then we sang about all the saints and many lauds. After this we sang Primes and seven psalms with litanies and the first mass. Then*

the Terce and we did the mass of the day. Afterwards we sang Sext and we ate, drank and went to sleep. Then we got up and sang Nones. Now we are here with you ready to listen to what you say to us.

Master: *When do you want to sing vespers or compline?*

Boy 2: *When it will be time.* **Master:** *Were you birched today?*

Boy 2: *No, I wasn't because I behaved myself carefully?*

Master: *And, what about your fellows?*

Boy 2: *Why do you ask me about this? I do not dare to reveal our secrets to you. Everyone knows whether he was beaten or not.*

Master: *What did you eat today?*

Boy 2: *I am still eating meat, as I am a boy acting under discipline.*

Master: *What else do you eat?*

Boy 2: *I eat vegetables, eggs, fish, cheese, butter, beans and all clean things, with thanksgiving.*

Master: *You are very greedy when you eat all that is put before you.*

Boy 2: *I am not so greedy that I can eat all types of food at one meal*

Master: *How then?*

Boy 2: *Sometimes I eat one type and sometimes others with sobriety as befits a monk, not with greed because I am not a glutton.*

Master: *What do you drink?*

Boy 2: *Ale, if I have it, or water if I don't have ale.*

Master: *Why don't you drink wine?*

Boy 2: *I am not rich enough to be able to buy myself wine and wine is not the drink of children or fools but old men and wise ones.*

Master: *Where do you sleep?* **Boy 2:** *In a dormitory with my brothers.*

Master: *What wakes you for the nocturnal services?*

Boy 2: *Sometimes I hear a bell and get up, sometimes my master wakes me more roughly with a stick.*

Master: *Good boys and worthy scholars, your teacher urges you to prepare for divine discipline and behave yourselves properly wherever you are. Enter obediently when you hear the church bells into the church and bow humbly to the sacred alter and stand in an orderly fashion, sing together and pray for your sins and depart, without fooling about, into the cloister or into the school*



“A patient man is more excellent than a strong one: he who governs his mind is better than he who conquers a city”

[Aelfric Homilies II, 545]