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Gilbert Crispin Abbot of Westminster

Gilbert Crispin (c. 1045–1117/18), fourth abbot of Westminster Abbey, was a scion of an important Norman family. Trained at Bec under St Anselm, later archbishop of Canterbury, he was a noted scholar and theologian. Under his rule, Westminster Abbey began to expand physically and grow in importance, making full play of its position as the chosen burial site of Edward the Confessor. The necessity to raise funds for the building work probably led to Crispin's association with the London Jewish community, and this was to inspire his most important theological work, *Disputation with a Jew*. In this 1911 book, J. Robinson Armitage, then dean of Westminster, mines the abbey archives to write both a biography and a discussion of Crispin's thirty-year administration of Westminster. He also includes the texts of all Crispin's known writings, together with a selection of charters. A significant work on a hitherto neglected Anglo-Norman churchman.

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Gilbert Crispin Abbot of Westminster

A Study of the Abbey under Norman Rule

J. ARMITAGE ROBINSON



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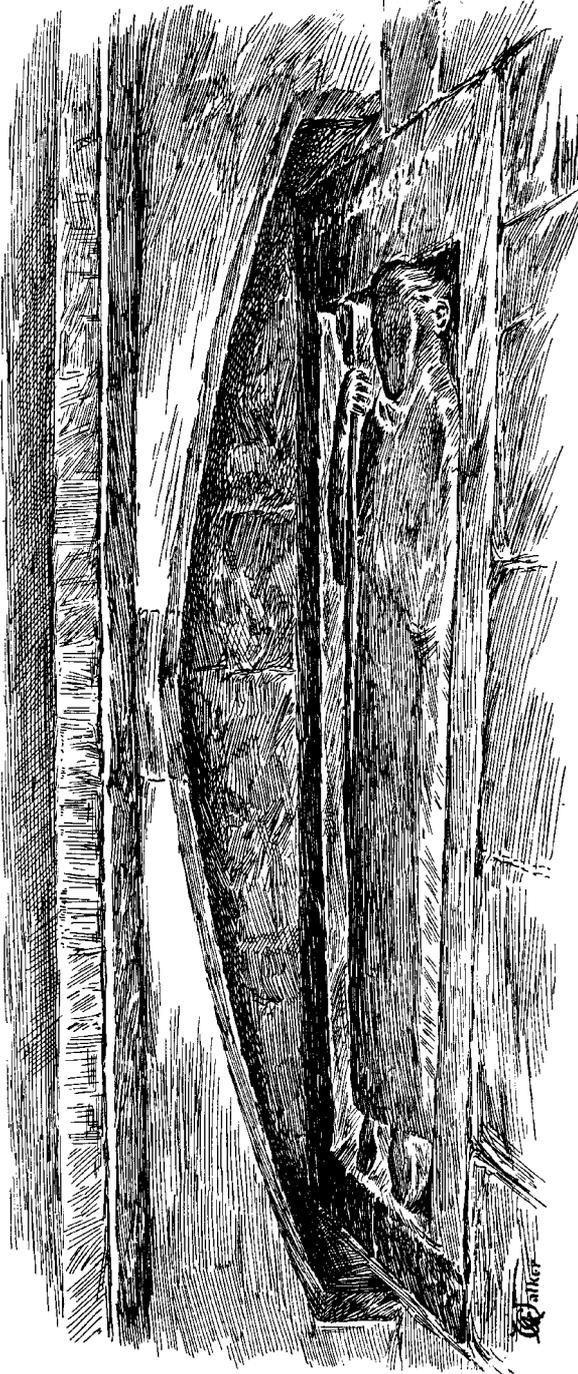
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BY
J. ARMITAGE ROBINSON, D.D.
DEAN OF WESTMINSTER

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PREFACE

GILBERT CRISPIN is the earliest abbot of Westminster of whom we have any considerable knowledge: and he is one of the greatest of the line, distinguished alike by his noble descent, his high character, the fame of his learning and the length of his rule. Yet, though his effigy has been before the eyes of every generation that has trod the cloisters in the past eight centuries, no one has cared to gather together what may be known of his life and times. Even his biography of Abbot Herluin has never been edited intact, though historians draw from it all they know of the early days of Bec, which gave three archbishops to Canterbury within seventy years. This neglect seems the more strange when we remember that he was a favourite pupil of both Lanfranc and Anselm, some of whose letters to him still survive; and that his judgment as a theologian could be appealed to on the continent more than a generation after his death.

He was a true monk and a scholar, with no desire for fame: his vocation and his instincts alike made him shrink from public affairs. His Westminster sons remembered him, as the Bec monks remembered their Anselm, chiefly for his gentleness; and they wrote the epithet *mitis* on his tomb before they praised his justice, wisdom, strength and learning.

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Preface

It has been a pleasure to restore the memory of this blameless man. As fragment after fragment of his story has revealed itself, his character has always remained without a stain. Other evidence may be found which has escaped my search; but there are few men, I think, of whom we may more safely say,

Whatever record leap to light
He never shall be shamed.

I owe special thanks to Dr Edward Scott, the keeper of the abbey muniments, to whose wide knowledge and unfailing helpfulness I have had constant recourse; and to the Reverend R. B. Rackham, whose work I can often hardly distinguish from my own, and who has taken on himself the labour of compiling the Index. For the frontispiece I am indebted to my friend Mr A. G. Walker, the sculptor, who took a kindly interest in Abbot Gilbert's time-worn effigy.

THE DEANERY, WESTMINSTER,
CHRISTMAS, 1910.

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