Stephen Harding, St. Biography

Stephen Harding, St.

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.

Contents

Stephen Harding, St. Biography.....1

Contents.....2

Biography.....3

Biography

The English monastic reformer and medieval abbot St. Stephen Harding (died 1134) helped to found the reformed Benedictine monastery of Cîteaux, France. The spirit and organization of the Cistercians, which date from his abbacy, reflect St. Stephen's ideas.

Before the Norman invasion of England, Stephen was a monk in the Benedictine abbey of Sherborne, Dorset. He left England during the troubled times that followed the Norman conquest. After a pilgrimage to Rome, Stephen lived in the Benedictine monastery in Langres, France. There he hoped to resume a quiet life of work and prayer. Stephen found monastic life at Langres appalling. The fat and prosperous monks were more concerned with local politics than their spiritual duties. To escape this undesirable environment, Stephen and 19 other monks decided to found a new monastery where they could live according to the ideals of St. Benedict. In 1098 they settled at Cîteaux in a deserted part of Burgundy near Dijon.

About 1109 Stephen became this group's third abbot. Although he succeeded in maintaining his fellow monks' sense of purpose and dedication, very few recruits joined their ranks. Stephen became discouraged about the future of their venture, and he was on the verge of resigning as abbot in 1112, when a young man named Bernard with 30 of his relatives and friends knocked on the door of the abbey and asked that they be admitted as novices: Soon more and more young men joined. Bernard was sent out in 1115 to start a new abbey at Clairvaux. From this time on, Cîteaux's growth was spectacular.

Stephen put his monastic ideals into writing in the "Charter of Charity." This code, dating from about 1119, became the main constitutional paper of the Cistercians. It provided that the monks would not wear any unnecessary clothes or eat any food not prescribed by the Rule of St. Benedict. The monastery would not own property except the land on which its buildings stood. The monks would grow all the food they needed, and everything produced would belong to all alike. The monks would not engage in any business with neighboring people. The life of each monk would be one of concentrated prayer and serious work.

By the time Stephen Harding died in 1134, his organizational ability and powers of leadership had fashioned a large and important movement in the Roman Catholic Church in France. By 1153 the monasteries founded from Cîteaux numbered 338.