

The History of John of Beverley⁸¹

Here begins the very wonderful history of the good hermit John, son of the count of Beverley, who was born in England.

In former days there lived a rich and powerful man in England, and he was count of Beverley. This count was a widower, as his lady had passed away. But he had from her body two beautiful children, who were a son called John and a daughter named Collette. These two children he very lovingly and amiably raised, as a good father is obliged to do.

How John of Beverley scorned the world and said farewell to his father the count and became a hermit.

And when this youth John of Beverley grew older, coming to manhood, and had understanding of good and evil, he came to think to himself that the world was full of deceit, and that one had but a brief time to live on this wretched world. Therefore he made a plan for himself, that he would abandon the world and all of its false works, inspired by the love of our sweet Lord, and he spoke to himself thus:

Deceit of the world, false and empty,
[I shall forsake you now and forever.]
You are nothing but a vale of tears,
For this living is all a decline,
Here there is no eternal city.
I wish to seek out a path
Other than that the world has taught me,
As he that turns himself to the world,
He will certainly be abused:
For he that serves the world, the world rewards.
Therefore I wish to forsake this world
And go and lead a holy life,
Serving God through every hour,
And lay down in devotion,
And beseech God in my prayers,
Night and day, early and late,
That he might forgive my misdeeds,
And protect me from all sins;
Since I notice in these hours
He who pledges his heart to God,
And holds himself to the holy Ten Commandments,

Will receive by this a greater reward
Than he that stays in service to the world.
Therefore I wish my immature youth
To be given over early to the virtues,
For I observe in my heart,
That virtue is the greatest good of all
By which one may win the kingdom of heaven.

And as this good and holy youth John thus stood against the world and despised it so bitterly, his father the count of Beverley came up to him and was very surprised by the words that his son said, that he would forsake him and all the world. And he spoke to him in this way: 'My beloved and favoured son John, what grieves you that you wish to leave me, my court and my land, where you have and will have everything you want? Therefore it surprises me greatly that you wish to leave me; this shall, I think, cost me my life, since I have no other security than you. That is why I plead with you, my dear son, that you will change your intentions and stay with me. I will pay you gold, silver and possessions aplenty, and I will acquire a rich wife for you so that you will be honoured forever, and I will make you lord of the land and countship of Beverley. That is why I plead that you will stay with me'.

