

47. Dhuoda's Advice to Her Son

Dhuoda was the wife of Bernard of Septimania, the chamberlain of Louis the Pious who had been accused in 830 of committing adultery with the Empress Judith and, hated by Louis's sons, was driven from court. In 841 Dhuoda, who had been at work protecting her husband's interests in the Spanish March, learned that her son, William, had, in effect, been handed over to Charles the Bald as a hostage to secure Bernard's good conduct. She wrote her Manual in order to counsel him, as only a mother could, she said, about how to survive and prosper in a difficult world. Her rich and complex treatise served in part as a way for Dhuoda to reconstitute her embattled and separated family. She also wanted to establish a circle of prayer that would bind up her family, living and dead, and win her a place in heaven. But, if Dhuoda lived much beyond 843 when she sent the Manual to William, she must have suffered even greater grief, for her husband was shortly afterwards murdered by Charles the Bald and William himself was executed in 850 when he was but twenty-four years old.

Source: trans. P.E. Dutton from Dhuoda, *Manuel pour mon fils*, ed. P. Riché, Sources Chrétiennes, vol. 225 (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1975), pp.84-86, 338-358.

[Preface to the Manual]

With our lord Louis [the Pious] once happily flourishing in the empire, with Christ's favor, in his eleventh year, on the third Kalends of July [29 June 824], at the palace of Aachen in a wedding ceremony, I became the legal wife of my lord and your father Bernard [of Septimania]. Again in the thirteenth year of [Louis's] reign, on the third Kalends of December [29 November 826], with God's help, as I believe, your birth, my most beloved first born son, into this world through me took place.

With the troubles and calamities of this world growing worse by the day and with many ups and downs and disruptions in the kingdom, the emperor went the way of all [mortals]. Just short of the twenty-eighth year of his reign [which began in 813 while Charlemagne was still alive], [Louis], somewhat prematurely, reached the end of his life. The year following his death, your brother was born on the eleventh Kalends of April [22 March 841]. He was the second child born to me [you being the first], with God's mercy, in the city of Uzès. In fact Bernard, the lord and father of both of you, ordered Elefantus, the bishop of Uzès, to take that little one, before he had been baptized, and to bring him into his presence in Aquitaine where he was staying with his retainers.

But since I have been parted from you for a long time and am living, on the orders of my lord, in this city where I now rejoice in [Bernard's] struggles, I have taken the trouble, because of my love for both of you, to have this little book (its size is in keeping with my intelligence) copied and sent to you. Although I am beset by many difficulties, nevertheless let this one thing happen according to the will of God, if he so wishes, that I might look upon your face once. Indeed I would wish for this, if the power [to do so] was given to me by God, but because salvation is far away from me as a sinner, I [can only] wish for it, and in this wishing my determination grows weaker.

I have heard that your father, Bernard, has commended you into the hands of the lord, King Charles [the Bald]. I urge you to do your dignified duty in this business to the best of your will. All the same, as the Scriptures say, "Seek the kingdom of God in all things and other things will then be given," those things which are necessary for you to enjoy your soul and body.

[Book 10]

1. Concerning Your Times

1. You have finished now four times four years.
If my second child were to reach the same age,
I would copy out another little book for his person.
2. And if you were to reach the age of 36,
And if I were to see you again,
I would with more words urge upon you even stronger things.
3. But because the time of my end hastens towards me,
And sickness everywhere wears my body out,
I have rushed to put together this book for the use of you and your brother.
4. Knowing that I shall not live another twenty years.
I urge you to savor this book as though it were a pleasant drink
And honey-laced food meant for your lips.
5. For the date when I married your father
And the date when you were born occurred on the
[Same Kalends] of [different] months, as I told you above.
6. Know that, from the first verse of this little book,
Until its last syllable,
Everything has been designed for the purpose of your salvation.
7. That you may more easily follow what is written there,
Read the acrostic verses.
8. The little verses written above and below, and everything else,
I myself have composed [or dictated] for the benefit of your soul and body,
And I do not cease even now urging you to read them and keep them close to your heart.

2. On the Verses Made from the Letters of Your Name

In the original Latin the first letter of the first word of each of the first seventeen stanzas can be put together to spell out VERSI AD VVILHELMUM: Verses for William.

1. That you might be strong and thrive, O best of sons,
Do not be reluctant to read the words I have composed and
Sent to you and may you effortlessly discover things
That please you.
2. The word of God is alive; look for it
Diligently and learn its sacred teaching,
For then your mind will be stuffed with
Great joy forever.
3. May the immense and powerful King, being radiant and kind,
Care to cultivate your mind in all things,
Young man, and to guard and defend you
Every minute of every day.
4. Be humble in mind and chaste in body,
Be ready to give proper service,
Show yourself constantly kind to all people,
Both the great and the not so great.
5. Above all, fear and love the Lord God
With your full heart and soul and expend all your strength,
Next fear and love your father
In all things.
6. Do not regret continually serving
The glorious offspring [Charles the Bald] of [that] race,
With its line of ancestors, for he shines
With the great.
7. Esteem magnates and respect those of high rank at court;
Be humble with the low;
Associate yourself with the well intentioned; be sure not to
Submit to the proud and the imprudent.
8. Always honor the true ministers
Of the sacred rites, the worthy bishops;
Always commend yourself simply and with outstretched hands
To the custodians of the altars.
9. Frequently give assistance to widows and orphans,
Give food and drink to pilgrims;
Offer hospitality; stretch out your hands
With apparel for the naked.
10. Be a strong and fair judge in legal disputes;
Never take a bribe;
Never oppress anyone, for the great Giver
Will repay you.

11. Be generous with gifts, but always vigilant and modest,
Make a sincere effort to get along with everyone,
Rejoice in humble things, for the image of this will
Stay with you.
12. There is One who weighs up everything,
A bestower who grants to each according to merit,
Assigning for [good] words and works the greatest of gifts:
The constellations of the heavenly stars.
13. Thus, my noble son, you should take care
And seek constantly to obtain
The great advantages [of heaven], and spurn
The fires of pitch-black wood.
14. Although, at sixteen, you are in the very flower
Of your youth, your delicate limbs
Age [along with you] step by step
As you proceed through life.
15. I long to see your face,
But the prospect seems distant to me.
Even if the power should be given to me,
Yet still I do not deserve this.
16. Would that you might live for Him who shaped you,
May you enter into, with gentle spirit, a fitting association
With his servants; may you with joy rise up again when your
Life is done.
17. My mind surely turns to thoughts of death,
But still I want you to read carefully the pages of this book,
As I have written them [for you], and keep them constantly
Foremost in your mind.
18. These verses, with the help of God, are now done
As you finish your sixteen years
At the start of December, on the Feast of Saint Andrew [30 November],
And the Advent of the Word.

3. A Postscript Concerning Your Public Life

The words of this little book are complete, which, as I was able, I have composed [or dictated] with happy heart and commanded to be copied out that they might be useful to you in your development.

For I want and advise that when, with the help of God, you have come to the appropriate time, you will establish your [own] household advantageously according to the proper grades of rank and, as is written about a certain man, "like the most tender little woodworm," do everything in your

public life faithfully and in due course.

I do not know whether I shall survive until I can see you, and I am uncertain if I deserve to and am uncertain over my health, and I am shaken amid the turbulence of my feeble struggle. Although this is the way things stand for me, yet everything remains possible for the Almighty. It is not within human power to do everything, but rather people achieve only as much as God decides to grant. According to Scripture, "It is not of him that wills nor of him that runs, but of God who shows mercy." Because of this, and trusting in God's mercy, I say nothing other than: "As it shall be the will of God in heaven, so let it be done." Amen.

4. Returning to Myself, I Mourn

Out of the profound depths of my love and my longing for your handsome face, I have almost forgotten myself but, even with the doors closed, I desire now to enter again into my own heart. But, because I am not worthy to be counted among the number listed before, nevertheless I ask you, with your considerable affection for me, and others not to stop praying for the remedy of my soul.

It is not hidden to you how, with constant illnesses and other troubles—just like the words of the one who said, "In perils from my own nation, in perils from the Gentiles, etc."—I have endured all these and similar things with my fragile body and in keeping with my limited worth. In fact, with God's help and by the grace of your father Bernard, I have surely escaped from all these perils, but my mind returns reflectively to those moments of liberation. I have, in the past, frequently been negligent in praising God. When I should have been praying at the seven [canonical] hours, I was instead seven times as slothful at those seven hours. For this reason, with all humility and all my power, I beg for the pleasing prospect of praying continually for the mercy of the Lord on behalf of my offenses and sins and that He may think me worthy to lift up, [however] damaged and weighed down, to heaven.

While you see that I am [still] alive in this world, alertly attempt in your heart to exert yourself so that, not only through vigils and prayers, but also by giving charity to the poor, I might deserve, when [finally] seized from my body and from the chains of my sinning, to be received kindly in every way by our kind Judge.

Constant prayer by you and others is needed by me now. It will be more, much more needed, after my death, which I believe will come very quickly. From an immense fear of what the future has in store for me, my mind is searching about everywhere. I am unsure from my merits just how I can be freed in the end. Why? Since I have sinned in thought and speech. Speech itself, if idle, leads to wicked business. Still, although things stand like this, I shall never despair of the mercy of God, not now, not ever. For me to achieve salvation at some point, I leave no other, my noble son, who might work as hard on my behalf as you. Many others too will work on my behalf because of you.

For the sake of my lord and master, Bernard, so that my service on his behalf in the [Spanish] March and in other places might not be useless, and so that he might not abandon you and me as is the practice of some men,

I am aware that I have fallen deeply into debt. From great need, I have often received into my hands loans not only from Christians, but also from Jews. I have paid back as much as I could, and I shall continue to do so as far as I can, but if, after my death, something remains outstanding, I ask and beg that you diligently find out who my creditors are. Once they are located, you should pay them everything owed not only from my own resources, if anything remains, but also from the resources you possess now and from those that you will, with God's grace, legitimately obtain in the future.

What more should I say? I have reminded you repeatedly about how you should act towards your little brother. I ask this as well, that if he should reach the right age, he too should take the trouble to pray for me. I urge you both, as if you were standing together now, to take the trouble to offer frequently on my behalf the libations of sacrifices and the offerings of the Host.

In this way when my Redeemer will have ordered me to leave this world, he will care to prepare a place of peaceful repose for me. If this happens because of the worthy prayers of you and other people, then the one whom we call God might receive me into heaven with the saints.

Here the Manual finishes. Amen. Thanks be to God.

5. The Names of the Dead

You will find here, briefly listed, the names of some people I omitted earlier. They are: William [of Gellone, the father of Bernard], Cunigund [the wife of William], Gerberga [the daughter of William who was drowned in the Saône by Lothar in 834], Witburgis [the second wife of William], Theoderic [a son of William], Gozhelm [a son of William who was decapitated by Lothar in 834], Guarnarius [possibly the father of Dhuoda], Rothlindis [possibly the mother of Dhuoda].

There are other relatives from this line still living, with God's help, for it falls entirely to the One who created them to recall them. What should you do on their behalf, my son, except say with the Psalmist: "We that live bless the Lord from this time now and forever."

Likewise, if any member of your family dies, that too belongs to the power of God to order. I ask that if you survive your uncle, lord Aribert [another son of William], you order his name to be inscribed with the names above and that you [also] pray for him.

6. About the Epitaph I Ask You to Inscribe on My Tomb

When I too have completed my time, order my name to be copied down with the names of the other dead. What I want, and what I long for with all my energy as if it were taking place at this very moment, is that you order these little verses to be carved on the stone face of the tomb that will cover my body in that place where I am to be buried. In this way, those who see the epitaph on my tomb may be inclined to pour out worthy prayers to God on my behalf, however unworthy I am.

But you readers of this Manual, whoever you are, think about the words that follow below and speak to God now on my behalf, as if I were already

shut up in my tomb, so that I might gain salvation.

Read here, O reader, the little verses of my epitaph!
Into the Hands of God.

Shaped of earth, the body of Dhuoda
Lies buried in this mound.
Powerful King, receive her.

This earth around her took back to the lower regions
The insignificant mud of her body:
Benign King, grant indulgence to her.

The earthen shadows of the tomb, wet with her wound,
Are all that is left her.
You, O King, forgive her sins.

Whether you be a man or woman, young or old,
As you walk back and forth here, I ask you to say this:
Holy God, dissolve her chains.

Locked in the tomb of a great wound
She ended her earthly life.
You, O King, forgive her her sins.

Lest that foul snake snatch away her soul,
Pray and say these words:
O Forgiving God, give her relief.

Let no one pass this place without reading this.
I beg everyone to pray, saying this:
Sweet God, give her rest.

Order, O kind one, that she receive
Everlasting light in the company of the saints.
May she receive the Lord's Amen after her demise.

Alpha and Omega.

Questions: Can a modern reader understand the psychological makeup and emotions of Dhuoda? If not, is there any point in reading the Manual which seems driven by Dhuoda's desire to speak from the heart to her absent son? How distraught over William's enforced service to Charles the Bald is Dhuoda? Why would she write such a book? What ideals does she wish to recommend to William? Is she at all critical of Bernard? What does she want for herself?

48. Walahfrid Strabo's Little Garden

Walahfrid rose to prominence at Louis the Pious's court as a client of Judith and the tutor of young Charles the Bald. When the revolts of 830 and 833 occurred, his life was severely disrupted. In 838 he was made the abbot of the great monastery of Reichenau, but in 840 he was driven from his post by Louis the German as the king sought control of eastern Francia. Though Walahfrid sought assistance from the Emperor Lothar, Louis eventually restored the monk to his office in 842. It is probably from these years of disruption that Walahfrid's little book on his herb garden at Reichenau comes, for Walahfrid's pastoralism in the Hortulus may be almost as political as Virgil's was in the Georgics. Walahfrid drowned in the river Loire in the summer of 849 while on royal business for Louis.

Source: trans. R.S. Lambert, in *Hortulus or the Little Garden: A Ninth-Century Poem by Walahfrid Strabo* (Wembley Hill, Middlesex: The Stanton Press, 1923).

How To Make A Garden

Though a life of retreat offers various joys,
None I think will compare with the time one employs
In the study of herbs, or in striving to gain
Some practical knowledge of nature's domain.
Get a garden! What kind you may get matters not,
Though the soil be light, friable, sandy and hot,
Or alternately heavy and rich with stiff clay;
Let it lie on a hill, or a slope gently away
To the level, or sink in an overgrown dell,
Don't despair, it will serve to grow vegetables well!
Provided no sloth takes the edge off your zeal,
And you never permit yourself scornful to feel
Of the infinite pains a true gardener must take,

The Difficulties of Gardening

Last winter—that symbol of age and decay,
That consumer of all the whole year stores away—
Was driven by spring to take refuge and hide
In the uttermost corner of earth's other side.
While his conqueror—crown and chief pride of the year,
Bade languishing nature recover her cheer,
And quickly removed every vestige and trace
Of the glutton, and put on all things a new face.
As the weather grew milder and fine days occurred,
And flowers and herbs by the west wind were stirred,
The soft tips of their shoots, so long lost to our sight,
In the bosom of earth to escape the frost's bite,
Began to reach out. Verdure clothed every tree;
Rough grass covered the mountain, and fine sward the lea.
Then the little court-yard that adjoins my front door