Between 1047 and 1056 Baldwin V, count of Flanders, fought a war against Emperor Henry III for control of Lotharingia. Much of the fighting occurred in Hainaut, the western part of Lotharingia that was subject to invasions from both the Empire and Flanders. Particularly hard hit was the Hainautian monastery of Lobbes. As stated in ch. 1, the war not only devastated the monastery itself, but also disrupted its control over its Flemish estates.

In 1066 the abbot therefore determined to send some monks with the relics of their patron saint, Ursmer, on a tour through Flanders (formally known as a delatio). The purpose was to confront the count of Flanders personally and gain his confirmation of their possessions, and also to raise funds from the churches and people of Flanders for rebuilding their church. The journey took some three months. Shortly after returning to Lobbes one of the monks wrote this account.

How does this account change your image of monasticism gained from the Constitutions of Lanfranc? Who "benefited" from monasticism and the cult of saints? What made possible the monks' (or rather, their saints') successes, i.e., their cures and their peace-makings?

A few short chapters from the Miracula have not been translated. Sections below in brackets are close paraphrases of the text.

1. Although in the mouth of a sinner praise may not be seemly, to praise God in the saints is in a certain sense a recognition of their greatness. For if preaching is a good work, to pass over the virtues of the saints would be evil, since they are the works of Christ, and in them we can only wonder in amazement at his good will. For these reasons, and also because we should disparage injustice and counsel obedience, we are eager to write for posterity of what, God speeding, St. Ursmer accomplished among the Flemish.

During that time in the war between Emperor Henry [III] and Count Baldwin [V], when justice, besieged and vanquished, could not rule over the lands, Lobbes was at its last extremity and lost the title of its nobility. Peasants died, inhabitants fled, and nothing remained of old save the stones and the earth to recall its former glory. But after Emperor Henry died, justice returned to the land, and willy-nilly, peace reigned in men of bad will; yet it was a false justice. Seizures ended. The reign of Saturn seemed to return. And though poor, each one received his liberty. Having attained this so-called peace, Abbot Adelard, rector of Lobbes, fretted over how to raise the church from so great a decline, since the church had suffered and been devastated more than other places. Taking counsel with his people, he could think of nothing to do unless divinity succoured them...
through the merits of the saints; for needs were great but means non-existent. The temple of St. Peter, which had largely been dismantled and rebuilt in more peaceful times, seemed more like a decrepit ruin than a foundation for renewal; and partly because of the wars and partly because of the negligence of its custodians, the possessions of the church had been diminished, especially in Flanders..., where St. Ursmer had converted those same Flemish to the Lord from pagan error, and had gained much land for St. Peter thanks to his preaching. But now the church had almost entirely lost all this because of its priors' lack of oversight due to the great distance [that separated the church from its lands].

Driven therefore by these many needs -- or rather taking advantage of the opportunities they provided -- having consulted both the older and the younger count, with their urging and petition and also with the permission and blessing of the bishops, St. Ursmer was brought forth, not just to redeem but to raise what was his from decline. Lifted up with honor and the meet veneration of his people, scarcely a day passed without some sign of miracles. No contagion of demons could rule before him, no feud command between enemies, no suffering of infirmity could prevail. But so as not to speak of all of them at once, let us try to recount each in turn....

3. [Progressing from Hainaut... rough Brabant into Flanders] we came on another day to the castle known as Lille, attended by a great concourse of people. How much love they bore towards the holy Confessor, and how great his feeling was for them, he showed clearly enough afterwards by piously interceding before God on their behalf: for before he left not one of them suffering from any infirmity had not been visited by the hand of God. When we departed the next day, all the townspeople, men and women, youth and elders, went with us. By their petition we set the body of the saint on a crossroads outside the town. Carefully noting the spot, they determined to erect a cross there. As they afterwards related, after that had been done whatever infirm persons slept on that spot received healing by the merits before God of him who had lain there.

4. On that same day a girl left with the others. Because she was pretty, one of the nobler of the young men was vanquished by love for her. However, the girl had a stepmother -- usually the worst kind of woman. She also wanted to follow the saint; but seeing her step-daughter go out first, and not daring to leave the house alone, she remained home against her will. When the girl returned home, the stepmother beat her so severely that she did not have the strength to rise from bed for eight days. And she abused her on account of that young man's love for her, calling her over and over again a whore. "You did not leave the other day for any devotion, but only to see him who inspires your wickedness." "O most wicked woman," the girl replied. "Let St. Ursmer judge between me and you; and if I did not follow him for that reason, may he strike the hand that you have raised against me with a horrible paralysis." The girl prayed and beseeched: and immediately such weakness came over her stepmother's entire arm that she was unable to raise it to her head for forty days. All the townspeople heard of this, and later told one of our monks passing through about the miracle.

5. Resuming our journey, we came to a certain town called Strazeele, where some knights had entered into such hostile feuds against one another that no mortal was able to bring them to peace. For several years such discord had
arisen among them that fathers lost their sons, sons their fathers, and
brothers their brothers, all by the instigation of the devil. When the
people flocked to the saint, it therefore happened that all of them also
gathered with their factions. Others, however, not part of the feud,
informed us about matters. We began to gather the different groups
together, separately, pleading that they give this dispute to God and the
saint, so that the number of dead might increase no further. A few
assented, though reluctantly, for fear of God and love of the saint; but a
minority utterly refused. "Eia!" said Baldwin, the dean. "Let us carry the
saint around [in a circle], so that they shall either consent and obey our
counsel, or dissenting, follow their leader, the devil, and be separated
from our company." And raising the saint from the ground, we processed
carefully and singing psalms so that all might be included within the
perimeter of the circuit. All those recalcitrants were immediately shocked,
for they did not know what to make of our people's actions; but this was our
intent: that such was our faith (fiducia) in the saint whom we followed that
if we could ever completely surround them in the procession, the enemy's
power would no longer be able to prevail over them. But behold the devil's
tricks! Crossing between us and them came the blackest of dogs, showing
them how [i.e., a spot, a hole in the closing circle] to break off and leave
us. They did not stop following him even after, for almost three months
later all were drawn into a battle, from which not one of those calumniators
came out alive.

6. Since they would not be persuaded, we left off preaching peace; yet by
the intervention of the saint we instilled peace in the hears of many
throughout our journey. After a few days we arrived at the castle called
Blaringhem to be hosted. Whether this was by chance or by God's providence
we would not know until morning brought light. A certain youth named Hugh
was the leader there (praemrat), the nobility of his bearing no less than
that of his birth. That very day he would be vexed with a judgment, and he
would not be able to establish concord without the shedding of much blood,
unless St. Ursmer succeeded by the mercy of God.

This Hugh had two knights in his household who often argued among
themselves with acid words, as youths will do. The dispute was not
concealed from the lord, who summoned his knights and demanded a judgment
concerning those two; and he succeeded in making peace between them, even
unto the kiss. But one of them, the one who had been more wounded by the
words, haboured the evil in his heart, feigning the kiss of peace until the
right time or place. It was not long in coming. Although of lesser birth,
his reputation as a knight was greater.... Waiting two days after his Lord
Hugh had departed, he approached his enemy, unsuspecting because of the
peace that had been made. He found him sitting in a cellar, and there
treacherously struck him through the chest with a lance -- killing him just
for a single word.

Clamor and riot ensued immediately. The killer entered the church, not
wishing to resist everyone all by himself. Some of the knights wanted to
kill him in the church; but the knight who had lordship after Hugh drew him
out in exchange for hostages, on the condition that he would restore him to
the church in a fortnight, when Hugh would return with arms. As it
happened, the holy Confessor made his entry into the church on that night,
the night, that is, of the Lord's Ascension. In the morning, a great crowd
of knights gathered in arms on both sides: here, those who would seize him
violently...; there, Hugh and his men, wanting to prevent inferiors from making matters into their own hands and seizing the guilty party. The entire courtyard of the church (atrium) glistened red from the shields, the steel of weapons shining in the rays of the morning sun, the horses snorting and whimpering. Hugh's men surrounded the church, swords drawn, all aching to shed the blood of one sinner. But then we moved right through their midst and entered the church. There we found the wretch prostrate before the altar as if already dead. We began by celebrating a mass for all the faithful, with litanies imploring divine mercy in a time of such great danger. After this, dressed in albs with hoods [pulled over our heads] as if for a solemn mass, we made our procession outside. First we humbly admonished Hugh that he not allow the blood of knights to flow for just one sinner. But our prayers availed nothing, though sobs and tears broke through with words of apology to the saint and to us. We then entered the church and without their knowledge placed the holy body in their midst. Astonished, all humbly lowered their eyes, showing by that restraint that they knew clearly enough who lay on the ground among them, even if they did not know him.* Tears flowed from the eyes of all: piety and wrath vied in their hearts. At last, piety won out in Hugh, who let that poor man depart with life, limbs, and even his grace.

In addition, almost 100 feuds were composed on this occasion among knights who were gathered there that day. One was a famous knight named Boniface. Two brothers had seized his castle and killed the wife to whom he had only recently been married, and also his son, not yet a year old. One of these two Boniface killed; the other had fled from his sight. But now, having heard of the saint's reputation, without guidance from any mortal, what he had not dared seek himself or through others he presumed to beg in mercy through St. Ursmer. And he found what he sought. No one went away from the saint unpacified that day: when he was placed on the ground in their midst, such piety seized all hearts, that no one could doubt that the grace of the Holy Spirit was present.

7. [The monks then travel to Cassel, where they set up their saint in a tent outdoors and healed a young girl. She had been bled for an illness, but the vein that had been opened in her forehead did not close. After hemorrhaging for nearly forty days, she was near death. Brought in on the arms of four older women, she asked if the saint could cure her and immediately began to spurt blood, until she collapsed on the ground. A little later she came round. The first thing she did was to ask for a candle, which she placed on the ground in front of the saint. At that moment her bleeding stopped, and did not return.]

8. After this we joined the count and countess at Bergues, and complained to them of the injustice they had committed against the lands of the saint. We were received by them with the reverence they owed the saint, and departed for our lodging, the saint in the temple, we in the cloister.... That night was the eve for the feast of the Holy Spirit's coming, that is, the fortieth day from the resurrection [i.e., Pentecost]....

9. We celebrated the feast day. The following day we left the town,

* I.e., the people had not "known" Ursmer because his was not a local cult; but they recognized his power.
followed by the count and countess, and with them two bishops, those of London and Thérouanne, along with all the Flemish nobility. A little outside the town, religion established her seat, since God wanted to exalt his saint in the sight of the princes. Therefore, having set down the burden of our treasure, we spoke of concord and peace in everyone’s hearing, recounting how divine grace had been present in the stages of our journey. Then we invited them to peace; and since there were among them many enemies, we called out each singly; and as much as each showed the desire and liberality for making a pact of peace, so much St. Ursmer interceded on his behalf before God. Not one out of all the nobles (optimates) dared resist the exhortations of peace. Indeed, so many pacts were made that day among them that no mortal could have arranged them, not for all the gold in the world, as Count Baldwin himself said publicly before everyone. No one remained outside a pact, no one went away unkissed. Thus having made peace, we left with our great patron.

10. The following night we received lodging in a village from the castellan of Veurne, acting on the countess’ orders. The castellan had a small son, scarcely five years old but blind since two. Hearing of the miracles which were being done through St. Ursmer, the castellan sent to us, that we might intercede with our patron on his behalf. The tumor had grown so large over his eyesockets that one could not see his eyes, but only swollen flesh. He spent that night before the saint, and returned the next. Before the third day his eyes had been restored to their full beauty and light.

11. [A minor miracle occurs at Bruges, after which the monks pass on to Ghent, now a month into their trip.]

12. As we continued on our way, St. Ursmer never ceased to heal the febrile, the grieving, and the infirm, and so we entered Oostburg, a huge crowd of people preceding us and following us, all singing praises. Sending messengers before them, the people of Oostburg came out to meet us. We went to the church, and from there to the place of our lodging. For three straight days a continuing line of people came and went. Just how necessary the saint’s coming was, God is witness, since we gathered there by his providence and care. In that stronghold there were almost forty knights among whom there was such a storm of feuds that none of them dared leave from or return to their homes without an armed escort. The slaying of relatives required the slaying of relatives more relatives. Vengeance only increased the weight of vengeance, because although everyone had the habit of fighting, no one the resources to win. But since they themselves could not end matters, at last they gave hostages for a period of truce, for a day when they might convene to adjudge matters. But they gathered as one only in body, not in spirit, desiring to impress others [with a show of strength], not for love of peace.... What was even worse was their greed. Here one man wanted to sell the death of a brother, there another would defend him by oath; but no one had any fear of perjuring himself, as long as someone was willing to spend. So some received oaths, while others received 10 pounds, or 20 or 30, or 100 and more. They left for the day [dissatisfied], to return the next. But if peace were not made, then the quest for vengeance would be all the more single-minded.

They gathered, then, the next day; but it worked out better because St. Ursmer was present as mediator. Those who had left in bad spirit the night before returned the next morning all armed; but
when Ursmer was placed in their midst, suddenly he recalled them to such peace and harmony, that all yielded pledges and oaths and swore peace on the body of the saint; and throwing down their arms they embraced and kissed. Then they entered the church with the saint so that we might beseech God for absolution and mercy for the souls of the dead; and they themselves began to sing the hymn, Te Deum Laudamus. We all sang together to the sound of the pealing bells, as people of both sexes praised God in the manner of the region.

13. There was in that place a woman, rich and noble, but deprived of sight for five years. Depressed in mind and body, she always sat in the shadows. Hearing of the saint's arrival, she rose quickly and had herself led to the church. There she sat, night and day, with a candle before the saint, as if at the feet of Jesus with Mary. As others laughed, she wept; as others made song she moaned, and a river of tears flowed from eyes that could not see. She moved everyone to piety, and especially us who had been doubtful about her chances for recovery. When others left to eat, she stayed next to the altar, fasting. When others slept, she remained awake in prayer. That very night, which was to be our last in the town, right about cockcrow, she cried out like the Canaanite to her maids, "Lift me up and set me before the saint! I feel for certain the strength of the supreme piety." There were at that time more than fifty people of both sexes in the church, all holding lights in their hands, singing hymns to God, not hymns like women sing (quasi feminis laudibus) but like canons. All of them immediately came running and gathered around the woman who lay prostrate in the form of a cross, hopeful for her prayer and praying for her. They cried. They sighed. After she had prayed a long time, she arose. A substance like an egg's albumen ran from her eyes, and she exclaimed that she could see, though not completely. The next day she followed the saint without any attendants -- a testimonoy to her cure.

14. After this news of us preceded us, and our entries were announced before us everywhere. People knew what the saint had done [and invented things that he had not done?]; and people came out to meet us eagerly. In one village whose name escapes us but where we were to be lodged for one night, a woman had a son, scarcely five years old, who had suffered from a debilitating fever for three years. At the very hour when we were about to arrive he threw himself on the ground, deaf and mute, thrashing about in agony. When we entered the village, the poor mother, took her son in her arms and carried him around the saint's eulogy three times. Returning home, she laid him on the spot where he had lain before, and then ran to us in the church to beg us for some holy water, into which she dipped the saint's pastoral staff. This she offered as a drink to her little one. Tasting it, he began to breathe a little; and when he was able to speak he called to his mother and told her that the drink had filled him with a great sweetness. Later he asked for some food, and he ate what was brought for him, then, comforted by the food, got up straightaway. When we later came to the house to buy some staples (for they had things to sell in the house) we found the boy playing with other boys -- and the mother praising the Lord.

15. On the third day a knight named Baldrad gave us lodging. He had one club foot, but no one was more upright in mind and deeds than he. He was a noble youth, one of the richer of them. Of the wise he was one of the
wiser, of the knights he was one of the best, and one of the chief counsellors of the count. How much love he felt for the saint showed clearly enough in his reception for us, and in the honor he gave to the saint with his gifts. Nor did he lose anything from this, although St. Ursmer showed us a pleasant enough game with him. For when we came there everyone was healthy -- that is, he and his wife and their two sons; but after two days all had taken ill. On the third day he hastened to us and with tears and contrition of heart began to make his claim (coepit exigere) to the saint for his wife and sons, beseeching us that we might kindly pray for them. Having received our promise, he returned home, finding them fully restored to health by the work of St. Ursmer.

16. While staying at the village called Lissewege, in the morning we began to invite enemies to peace for the love of the saint. More than fifty knights followed us then, some disputing, others wishing reconciliation, still others asking for peace from their enemies through the saint. When finally we thought we had reconciled everyone by the grace of God, behold a man stole through the crowd...and, barefoot, threw himself in the form of a cross before the feet of another man. Crying out for mercy, he begged a hundred times for forgiveness, because one day he had killed two knights who were his brothers. The man whom he begged was Robert, a powerful youth, chief of a force of almost 200 knights. Shocked by this sudden turn of events, partly because of surprise, partly because of his grief for the two knights, he fell down supine. Everyone wept quietly. You would have had to be a stone not to weep. At last some people raised the knight; but again he prostrated himself, throwing himself on our prayers. The impasse seemed serious to us, difficult to the point of despair, yet we had faith in our patron. We came before the youth, kneeling before his sublimity in prayer. Against this he claimed the excuse of grief. He resisted us. We persisted in prayer. And in the middle lay the guilty party, beseeching mercy for the sake of God and the saint. At this the youth fell silent and began to weep, his face changing color, now wan, now red, madly gnashing his teeth, resistant. What more can one say? He would have fled if he had had the chance. Meanwhile, we left off our entreaties, and distracting his attention (dissimulando) took up St. Ursmer and laid him on a pall at his feet. The youth was dumfounded, and with great sobs cast himself on the ground, crying out that he was a pitiable wretch and eating dirt in his grief. Three now lay there, prostrate alike and yet not alike: St. Ursmer, as if begging pardon for the guilty man; the guilty one begging pardon for himself; and the youth prostrate before the saint, to beg pardon for himself. One could see devotion there (pietas) but hear nothing, for there were no sounds save sobs, no voices but only tears. The cheeks and beards of the knights ran with tears, flowed for three hours while the silence lasted among us, for none of us could produce a single word, but only cries and moans. But at last, St. Ursmer won, and by a marvellous sign seized the minds and attention of everyone: from the ground on which he had lain unwillingly, he made himself levitate quickly. Wonder of wonders, smoke rose from the reliquary. Everyone stepped back and looked on in terror, and then immediately fell with their faces to the ground, striking their breasts with resounding blows. Let before him, the youth tearfully begged pardon; and as he merited receiving it, so he gave his pardon to the guilty man, confirming the peace with an oath and a kiss.

17. When we left the town everyone came out with us. We then received
lodging at a village called Leffingehe. There nature had been troubled, as for three months heaven and earth had waited for St. Ursmer. The sterile land was bone-dry. The heavens refused to release their waters -- save by the intercession of the saint. For when the inhabitants came out to meet us, begging for rain through the saint with litanies and songs, behold, a flood of rain followed without any delay at all, so that there could be no doubt that it had come by the intervention and merits of the confessor.
First, however, he allowed us to enter the church, not wanting it to rain on his people, or the water to fall on us instead of the land. All night it rained, then in the morning it dawned clear. We rose and celebrated mass.
We composed pacts in our accustomed manner wherever God wanted. Then, although the peasants wanted us to stay, we departed.

18. Daily our saint worked these and other things like them, rewarding his hosts with beautiful gifts. We then came to Ghent on Sunday. Like a swarm of bees townspeople of both sexes ran out to meet us. Having entered the castle we first went to pray at Saint-Pharaid; and after resolving more than twenty conflicts, we went to the monastery of St. John the Baptist.
Staying there that night, we sent word to St. Peter's, asking if they might receive us the next day so that we might rest, because we were tired from our journey. They received the saint with due veneration, us with due charity. We gave ourselves up to leisure; but St. Ursmer continued to work for himself and for us. Led by God, a certain girl entered the temple, and coming before the altar where the saint had been placed began to pray. Her left side had begun to decay, so that it was not pleasant to look at but repelling because of its blackness, and her arm was attached to her side, her hand to her breast, thorax vero et brachium simul haerent, ad modum ducti culi transmissi osae. She arose after praying, and standing half-naked (for she was poor and a beggar) she crossed herself in a girlish manner (puellariter); and behold, the arm separated from the ribs and the hand from the breast (os. quo thorax et brachium confixa erant. ante altare exilivit), and blood flowed freely from the wound. Wonderful and wretched to see, the girl collapsed as if dead. And immediately, in one instant, having received her healing, her blackness receded by the intervention of the saint. The Vesper's bells rang. Several monks and lay people were about. We sang vespers, and afterwards, as the people gathered, we sang the hymn Te Deum Laudamus. As for the girl, she followed us to Lobbes, not preaching of the saint but showing herself as the best testimony of her own salvation.

19. It would have been wrong to omit prayers to St. Bavon; and we determined to go there with a monastic procession. We again celebrated mass at the church of St. John the Baptist. Along with many others, there was present there a very old woman, blind in one eye for several years. She begged that we place the saint's pastoral staff over her. We began to laugh, since she had not lost her vision out of any disease but some twenty years earlier from old age. Still, St. Ursmer had pity on her; for when we placed the staff over her, she pointed to her eye and gave thanks, exclaiming that she had never seen so clearly. Some cried out of devotion. Others laughed that she pointed to her eye thus; but all of the townspeople confirmed that they did not know her. After celebrating mass we processed to Saint-Bavon accompanied by a crowd of people, where we were received with such veneration that it was as if we were all saints.

20. [The monks pass on to a village where they ask the local priest for
lodging. He refused and barred and locked the doors against them. The monks therefore set up their tents in the courtyard before the church; but even as they were doing so they heard the barricades within the church fall with a resounding echo. The monks entered the church. When the priest returned he was "confounded" and "begged pardon" from the monks. The next morning he again prostrated himself before them and received absolution from them, this time in front of all the villagers, and explained what had happened in Flemish.

21. Hastening our journey, we returned to Brussels. On the eighth day in the midst of a thronging crowd, there was a lame woman, who walked on crutches dragging one foot and so quickly fell behind, since she could not keep up with the others. But calling on the saint to let her walk with devotion only, she kept at it (in pressus enitendo). Soon feeling the help of God and the saint within her, she threw away one crutch, while still holding on to the other; and supporting herself on the ground with her knuckles she came after us to the church, praising God and speaking of the cure to everyone. She was known to everyone, since she was a mine but one of upright life and manners. Peace was established in the hearts of many that day; for whether or not they wanted the staff of the saint, no one could deny peace after offering a kiss. Departing from there, travelling through other places with great glory, we arrived at Lobbes on the vigil of the Apostles, that is, on the tenth day. And since it was a feast day we set our patron in the chief temple, where he remained for several days with us.

22. That night, that is, the night before the saint was to be returned to his monastery with the first light, a man... came to the church with his young son, who had lost his eyesight a year before, I know not how. Placing himself before the saint, he kept vigil and prayed until dawn. Night brought nothing. When we returned the saint in the morning, he came with us, bringing his son. But when we replaced the saint in his place, the man tossed away the staff which he had been holding in his hand, calling on the saint and saying to his son, "Run, now, and give me back what I have thrown down there." The boy immediately regained his sight, and as all of us looked on he retrieved the staff which the father had cast away and returned it to him. This man was our neighbor [the boy also]; he was not one of the richer people in the village. But though he was in need of much, yet thanks be to God and St. Ursmer, he was enriched with the sight of his eyes.