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WILLIAM RUFUS PERKINS

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HISTORY
OF
THE TRAPPIST ABBEY
OF
NEW MELLERAY,
IN DUBUQUE COUNTY, IOWA.

BY
WILLIAM RUFUS PERKINS, A.M.,
PROFESSOR OF HISTORY.

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1892.

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PREFACE.

The history of Mt. Melleray in Ireland, and of New Melleray in Dubuque County, Iowa, is founded upon original sources, viz: the records and manuscripts of the Abbeys and oral communications of the monks.

The editions of Helyot and of Felibien which have been used for the earlier history of the monastic houses are respectively those of 1715-21, and 1671.

The letter of Felibien to the Duchesse de Liancourt, and which constitutes the volume usually known as "Description de la Trappe," was first printed in 1671. The edition used by the author is that of 1671, and the volume was originally in the library of the Carmelites at Rennes. This library was probably despoiled at the time of the French Revolution, and the little book, in its original binding, has wandered at last to the prairies of Iowa.

The author desires to express his deep obligation to the authorities of New Melleray Abbey, and in particular to the Rev. Father Superior and to Rev. Father Placid, for courtesy and assistance. Few men engaged in historical researches have met with so cordial and hearty appreciation as has been vouchsafed by the monks of New Melleray to the author. It is impossible for me adequately to express my sense of their kindness and thoughtfulness and hospitality.

McClary
1-16-31

I desire especially to thank the Rev. Father Placid for unnumbered kindnesses, and to express here my warm affection for him, an affection which rests not only upon his indefatigable efforts in my behalf as a historian, but which rests also upon my appreciation of him as a high-minded and excellent man.

W. R. P.

Iowa City, July, 1892.

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HISTORY
OF THE
TRAPPIST ABBEY OF NEW MELLERAY
IN
DUBUQUE COUNTY, IOWA.

The ancient Abbey of Nôtre Dame de la Maison-Dieu de la Trappe lies in a secluded valley near the frontiers of Perche in the present department of the Orne.² The name is derived from the physical nature of the country which, diversified with hills, discloses at least one valley whose entrance is through a narrow and rocky gorge. This entrance, which to some vivid imagination seemed like a trap-door, gave a name to the village and the adjacent monastery. The following description of the Abbey and its surroundings, published in 1671, will give some idea of the impression which its situation produced in the last part of the seventeenth century.

"This Abbey is situated in a large valley. The woods and the hills which surround it are disposed as if designed to hide it from the rest of the world. They enclose arable lands, plantations of fruit trees, pasture grounds, and nine ponds which encompass the Abbey, and render it so difficult of access that it is very hard to come at it without a guide. There was hitherto a road from Montagne to Paris behind the walls of the garden; but though it was in the wood, and above five hundred paces from the enclosure, and though it was not possible to remove it farther without a vast expense, yet the