

THE  
*Didascalicon*  
OF HUGH  
OF ST. VICTOR

*A MEDIEVAL GUIDE  
TO THE ARTS*

TRANSLATED FROM THE LATIN  
WITH AN INTRODUCTION  
AND NOTES BY  
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*Frontispiece:*

CONVENTIONALIZED REPRESENTATION OF

HUGH OF SAINT VICTOR

(Leiden, University Library, ms Vulcanianus 46, f. 130)

Produced at Fulda in 1176-77, it accompanies the text of Hugh's *Didascalicon*. On the open book appears the first sentence of the *Didascalicon*: *Omnium expetendorum prima est sapientia in qua (perfecti boni) forma consistit* (Of all things to be sought, the first is that Wisdom in which the Form of the Perfect Good stands fixed).



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## PREFACE

There are many persons whose nature has left them so poor in ability that they can hardly grasp with their intellect even easy things, and of these persons I believe there are two kinds. There are those who, while they are not unaware of their own dullness, nonetheless struggle after knowledge with all the effort they can put forth and who, by tirelessly keeping up their pursuit, deserve to obtain as a result of their will power what they by no means possess as a result of their work. Others, however, because they know that they are in no way able to compass the highest things, neglect even the least, and, as it were, carelessly at rest in their own sluggishness, they all the more lose the light of truth in the greatest matters for their refusal to learn those smallest of which they are capable. It is of such that the Psalmist declares, "They were unwilling to understand how they might do well."<sup>1</sup> Not knowing and not wishing to know are far different things. Not knowing, to be sure, springs from weakness; but contempt of knowledge springs from a wicked will.

There is another sort of man whom nature has enriched with the full measure of ability and to whom she shows an easy way to come at truth. Among these, even granting inequality in the strength of their ability, there is nevertheless not the same virtue or will in all for the cultivation of their natural sense through practice and learning. Many of this sort, caught up in the affairs and cares of this world beyond what is needful or given over to the vices and sensual indulgences of the body, bury the talent of God in earth,<sup>2</sup> seeking from it neither the fruit of wisdom nor the profit of good work. These, assuredly, are completely detestable. Again, for others of them, lack of family wealth and a slender income decrease the opportunity of learning. Yet, we decidedly do not believe that these can be

altogether excused by this circumstance, since we see many laboring in hunger, thirst, and nakedness attain to the fruit of knowledge. And still it is one thing when one is not able, or to speak more truly, when one is not easily able to learn, and another when one is able but unwilling to learn. Just as it is more glorious to lay hold upon wisdom by sheer exertion, even though no resources support one, so, to be sure, it is more loathsome to enjoy natural ability and to have plenty of wealth, yet to grow dull in idleness.<sup>3</sup>

The things by which every man advances in knowledge are principally two—namely, reading and meditation. Of these, reading holds first place in instruction, and it is of reading that this book treats, setting forth rules for it. For there are three things particularly necessary to learn for reading: first, each man should know what he ought to read; second, in what order he ought to read, that is, what first and what afterwards; and third, in what manner he ought to read. These three points are handled one by one in this book. The book, moreover, instructs the reader as well of secular writings as of the Divine Writings. Therefore, it is divided into two parts,<sup>4</sup> each of which contains three subdivisions. In the first part, it instructs the reader of the arts, in the second, the reader of the Sacred Scripture. It instructs, moreover, in this way: it shows first what ought to be read, and next in what order and in what manner it ought to be read. But in order to make known what ought to be read, or what ought especially to be read, in the first part it first of all enumerates the origin of all the arts, and then their description and division, that is, how each art either contains some other or is contained by some other, thus dividing up philosophy from the peak down to the lowest members. Then it enumerates the authors of the arts and afterwards makes clear which of these arts ought principally to be read; then, likewise, it reveals in what order and in what manner. Finally, it lays down for students their discipline of life, and thus the first part concludes.

In the second part it determines what writings ought to be called divine, and next, the number and order of the Divine Books, and their authors, and the interpretations of the names of these Books. It then treats certain characteristics of Divine Scripture which are very important. Then it shows how Sacred

Scripture ought to be read by the man who seeks in it the correction of his morals and a form of living. Finally, it instructs the man who reads in it for love of knowledge, and thus the second part too comes to a close.