

THE LIFE

of Our Most Holy Father Saint Benedict

BEING THE SECOND BOOK OF THE DIALOGUES

OF ST. GREGORY THE GREAT.

INTRODUCTION.

THERE was a man of venerable life, Benedict by name and grace, who from the time of his very childhood carried the heart of an old man. His demeanour indeed surpassing his age, he gave himself no disport or pleasure, but living here upon earth he despised the world with all the glory thereof, at such time as he might have most freely enjoyed it. He was born in the province of Nursia of honourable parentage and sent to Rome to study the liberal sciences. But when he saw there many through the uneven paths of vice run headlong to their own ruin, he drew back his foot, but new-set in the world, lest, in the search of human knowledge, he might also fall into the same dangerous precipice. Contemning therefore learning and studies and abandoning his father's house and goods, he desired only to please God in a virtuous life. Therefore he departed skilfully ignorant and wisely unlearned. I have not attained unto all this man did, but the few things which I here set down, were related to me by four of his disciples; namely, Constantine, a very reverend man, who succeeded him in the government of the Monastery; Valentinian, who for many years bore rule in the Monastery of Lateran, Simplicius, who was the third superior of that congregation after him, and Honoratus who yet governeth the Monastery which he first inhabited.

CHAPTER I.

BENEDICT having now left the schools resolved to betake himself to the desert, accompanied only by his nurse who most tenderly loved him. Coming therefore to a place called Affile, and remaining for some time in the Church of St. Peter by the charitable Invitement of many virtuous people who lived there for devotion, so it chanced that his nurse borrowed of a neighbour a sieve to cleanse wheat, which being left carelessly upon the table was found broken in two pieces. Therefore on her return finding it broke, she began to weep bitterly because it was only lent her. But the religious and pious boy, Benedict, seeing his nurse lament was moved with compassion, and taking with him the two pieces of the broken sieve, with tears he gave himself to prayer, which no sooner ended, but he found the sieve whole, and found not any sign that it had been broken. Them presently he restored the sieve which had been broken, whole to his nurse, to her exceeding comfort. This matter was divulged unto all that lived thereabout, and so much admired by all, that the inhabitants of that

place caused the sieve to be hanged up in the Church porch, that not only those present, but all posterity might know with how great gifts of grace Benedict had been endowed from the beginning of his conversion. The sieve remained to be seen for many years after, and hung over the Church door even until the times of the Longobards

But Benedict more desirous to suffer afflictions than covetous of praise; and rather willing to undergo labours for the honour of God, than to be extolled with the favours of this world, fled secretly from his nurse to a remote place in the desert called Subiaco, distant about forty miles from Rome, in which a fountain springing with cool and crystal waters, extendeth itself at first into a broad lake, and running farther with increase of waters becometh at the last a river. As he was travelling to this place, a certain monk called Romanus met him and asked whither he was going. Having understood his intention, he both kept it secret and afforded him help, moreover he gave him a religious habit and assisted him in all things. The man of God being come to this place lived for the space of three years in an obscure cave, unknown to any man except Romanus the Monk, who lived not far off in a Monastery governed by Father Deodatus. But he would piously steal forth, and on certain days bring to Benedict a loaf of bread which he had spared from his own allowance. But there being no way to the cave from Romanus his cell by reason of a steep and high rock which hung over it, Romanus used to let down the loaf by a long cord to which also he fastened a little bell, that by the sound of it, the man of God might know when Romanus brought him the bread, and going out may receive it. But the old enemy, envying the charity of the one and the reflection of the other, when on a certain day he beheld the bread let down in this manner, threw a stone and brake the bell. Notwithstanding, Romanus afterwards failed not to assist him in the best manner he was able. Now when it pleased Almighty God that Romanus should rest from his labours, and that the life of Benedict should be manifest to the world for an example to all men, that the candle wet upon a candlestick might shine and give light to the whole Church of God, our Lord vouchsafed to appear to a certain Priest living far off, who had made ready his dinner for Easter Day, saying to him: "Thou hast prepared good cheer for thyself, and My servant in such a place is famished for hunger." Who presently rose up, and on the solemn day of Easter went towards the place with such meat as he had provided for himself, where seeking the man of God, amongst craggy rocks, winding valleys and hollow pits he found him hid in a cave. Then after prayers, and blessing the Almighty Lord, they sat down, and after some spiritual discourse the Priest said: "Rise, and let us take our reflection, for this is Easter Day." To whom the man of God answered: "I know it is Easter, because I have found so much favour as to see thee." (For not having a long time conversed with men, he did not know it was Easter Day.) The good Priest did therefore again affirm it, saying: "Truly this is the day of our Lord's Resurrection, and therefore it is not fit that you should keep abstinence, and for this cause I am sent that we may eat together that which Almighty God hath bestowed on us." Whereupon blessing God, they fell to their meat. Their discourse and dinner ended, the Priest returned to his Church.

About the same time certain shepherds found him hid in a cave; who, at the first, spying him among the bushes, clothed in the skins of beasts, took him for some wild beast, but afterwards knowing him to be a servant of god, many of them were converted from their savage life to virtue. By this means his name began to be famous in the country, and many did resort unto him, bringing with them necessaries for his body, while they received from his lips the food of life.

CHAPTER II.

How he overcame a temptation of the flesh.

THE holy man being on a certain day alone, the tempter was at hand; for a little black bird, commonly called an ousel, began to fly about his face, and that so near as the holy man, if he would, might have taken it with his hand; but no sooner had he made the sign of the cross than the bird vanished. When presently so great a carnal temptation assailed him, that before the holy man had never felt the like. for the remembrance of a woman which some time he had seen, was so lively represented to his fancy by the wicked spirit, and so vehemently did her image inflame his breast with lustful desires, that almost overcome by pleasure, he was determining to leave the wilderness. But suddenly assisted with divine grace he came to himself, and, seeing near him a thicket full of nettles and briars, he threw off his garments and cast himself naked into the midst of those sharp thorns and nettles, where he rolled himself so long, that, when he rose up, all his body was pitifully rent; thus by the wounds of his flesh he cured those of his soul, by turning pleasure into pain; and by the vehemence of outward torments he extinguished the unlawful flame which burnt within overcoming sin by changing the fire. After which time, as he himself related to his disciples, he was so free from the like temptation, that he never felt any such motion.

Many after this began to forsake the world and to hasten to put themselves under his government. Being now altogether free from vice, he worthily deserved to be made a master of virtue. As it is commanded by Moses that the Levites should serve from five and twenty years and upward, and after fifty years they should be appointed to keep the holy vessels.

PETER.

I have already understood something of this testimony alleged, yet I pray make it more plain unto me.

GREGORY.

It is manifest, Peter, that in youth the temptations of the flesh are great, but after fifty natural heat waxeth cold: now the souls of good men are the holy vessels. Therefore while the elect are in temptation, it is necessary that they live under obedience, and be wearied with labours, but when, by reason of their age, the fervour of temptations is assuaged, they are ordained keepers of holy vessels, that is become instructors of souls.

PETER.

I confess what you say has given me full satisfaction, and therefore this place of Scripture being clearly expounded, I pray you hasten on with the holy man's life which you have begun.

CHAPTER III.

How St. Benedict brake a glass by the sign of the cross.

HAVING thus vanquished this temptation, the man of God like a good soil well manured and weeded, brought forth abundant fruit of the seed of virtue, so that his fame began to spread itself more largely. Not far off was a Monastery, whose Abbot being dead, the whole Convent repaired to the venerable man Benedict, and with earnest persuasions requested him for their Abbot, which he refused for a long time, forewarning them that his manner of life and theirs were not agreeable; yet at length overcome with importunity he gave consent. But when in the same Monastery he began to observe regular discipline, so that none of the Monks (as in former time) were permitted by their disorder to swerve any way from the path of virtue, which receiving they fell into a great rage, and began accusing themselves of their choice in receiving him for a Superior, whose integrity of life was disproportionate to their perverseness.

And therefore, when they perceived themselves restrained from unlawful acts, it grieved them to leave their desires, and hard it was to relinquish old customs and begin a new life, besides the conversation of good men is always odious to the wicked, they began therefore to plot his death, and after consultation had together, they poisoned his wine. So when the glass which contained the empoisoned drink was, according to the custom of the Monastery, presented at table to be blessed by the Abbot, Benedict putting forth his hand and making the sign of the Cross, the glass which was held far off brake in pieces, as if instead of blessing the vase of death, he had thrown a stone against it. By this the man of God perceived that the glass had in it the drink of death which could not endure the sign of life. So presently rising up with a mild countenance and tranquil mind, having called the Brethren together, he thus spake unto them: "Almighty God of His mercy forgive you, Brethren, why have you dealt thus with me? Did not I foretell you that my manner of life and yours would not agree? Go, and seek a Superior to your liking; for you can have me no longer with you." This said, he forthwith returned to the solitude he loved s well, and lived there with himself, in the sight of Him who seeth all things.

PETER.

I Do not well understand what you mean: "He lived with himself."

GREGORY.

If the holy man had been longer constrained to govern those who had unanimously conspired against him, and were so contrary to him in life and manners, it might, peradventure, have diminished his own vigour and fervour of devotion, withdrawing his mind from the light of contemplation. So that over much busied in correcting the faults of others, he might have neglected his own; and so perhaps lost himself, and yet not gained others. For as often as by contagious motions we are transported out of ourselves we remain the same, but not with ourselves, because not looking into our own actions, we are wandering about other things. For do we think that he was with himself who went into a far country, consumed the portion allotted to him, and, after he had put himself into the service of a citizen of that country, kept his hogs, and was glad to eat the husks which they are: notwithstanding, when he began to consider what he had lost, as the Scripture testifieth: "Being come to himself, he said: how many hirelings in my father's house have plenty of bread." If, therefore, he were before with himself, how was it true that he returned to himself?

I may well say, therefore, that his holy man lived with himself, because he never turned the eye of his soul from himself, but standing always on his guard with great circumspection, he kept himself continually in the all-seeing eye of his Creator.

PETER.

How is it then to be understood, which is written of the Apostle Peter, when he was led by the Angel out of the prison? Who returning to himself said: "Now I know assuredly that the Lord hath sent his Angel, and hath delivered me out of the hands of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews."

GREGORY.

Two ways, Peter, we are carried out of ourselves: for either by sinfulness of thought we fall beneath ourselves, or by the grace of contemplation we are raised above ourselves. He therefore, that kept the hogs, by his inconstancy of mind and uncleanness, fell beneath himself: but he, whom the Angel loosed and ravished into an ecstasy, was indeed out of himself, but yet above himself. But both of them returned to themselves, the one when, reclaiming his lewd life, he was converted at heart, the other when from the height of contemplation, he returned to his natural and ordinary understanding. Thus venerable Benedict in that solitude dwelt with himself, for as much as he kept himself within his thoughts: for as often as by the fervour of contemplation he was elevated, without doubt he left himself as it were beneath himself.

PETER.

I like well this you say but resolve me, I pray you, should he have left those Monks of whom he had once taken charge?

GREGORY.

In my opinion, Peter, a bad community may be tolerated where there are found at least some good which may be helped. But where there is no benefit to be expected of any good, labour is many times lost upon the bad. Especially if there be any present occasions wherein we may do God better service. Now whom was there whom the holy man should have stayed to govern, when they had all conspired against him? And many things are considered by the soul of the perfect which ought not to be passed in silence, for they, perceiving their endeavours to be without effect, depart to some other place, there to employ themselves more profitably. Wherefore that famous preacher who desired to be dissolved and to be with Christ, unto whom to live is Christ, and to die is gain, did not only desire himself to suffer, but did also animate others to do the like. He being persecuted at Damascus, caused himself to be let down from the wall by a cord and basket whereby he escaped privately. Shall we say then that Paul feared death which he earnestly desired for the love of Christ, as appeareth by his own testimony? But as he foresaw that his endeavours there would profit little, with much difficulty he reserved himself to labour in another place with better success. For this valiant champion of God would not be confined to so narrow limits, but sought battles in the open field. So you may observe that the venerable Benedict, left not so many incorrigible in that place as he converted to a spiritual life elsewhere.

PETER.

You say true, as both reason and the example alleged prove, but I pray return to prosecute the life of this holy Father.

GREGORY.

The holy man for many years in that desert increased wonderfully in virtues and miracles, whereby a great number in those parts were gathered together in the service of Almighty God: so that, by the assistance of our Lord Jesus Christ, he built there twelve monasteries, in each of which he put twelve Monks with their superiors, and retained a few with himself whom he thought to instruct further.

Now began divers noble and devout personages from Rome to resort to him, and commended their children to be brought up by him in the service of Almighty God. At the same time, Equitius brought unto him Maurus, and Tertullus a Senator his son Placidus, both very hopeful children, of which two, Maurus, although young, yet by reason of his forwardness in the school of virtue, began to assist his master, but Placidus was as yet a child of tender years.

CHAPTER IV.

How he reclaimed an indevout Monk.

IN one of those Monasteries which he had built thereabout, was a certain Monk that could not stay at his prayers, but, so soon as he saw his brethren kneel and dispose themselves for their mental prayer, he would go out, and there spend his wandering thoughts upon worldly and transitory things. For which, having been often admonished by his Abbot, he was brought before the man of God, who also sharply reprehended him for his folly; but, returning to his Monastery, he scarce remembered two days what the man of God had said to him, for the third day he fell to his old custom, and at the time of prayer went out again: whereof when the servant of God was informed by the Abbot the second time, he said: "I will come myself and reform him." And when he was come to the same Monastery, and the Brethren after the Psalms ended, at the accustomed time betook themselves to prayer, he perceived a little black boy, who pulled this Monk (who could not remain at his prayers) out by the hem of his garment. This he insinuated secretly to Pompeianus Abbot of the Monastery, and to Maurus: "See you hot there who it is that draweth this Monk out?" Who answered, "No." "Let us pray", replied he, "that you may likewise see whom this Monk followeth." After prayer continued for two days, Maurus the monk saw, but Pompeianus the Abbot of the Monastery could not perceive anything. The next day when the man of God had finished his prayer he went out of the Oratory, and found the Monk standing without, whom he forthwith strake with a wand, and from that time ever after the Monk was free from the wicked suggestion of the black boy, and remained constant at his prayers. For the old enemy, as if himself had been beaten with the whip, dared no more to take command of his thoughts.

CHAPTER V.

How by the prayer of the man of God a spring issued from the top of a mountain.

THREE of the Monasteries, which he founded in that place, were built upon the cliffs of a mountain, which was very troublesome to the Monks always to be forced to descend to the lake to fetch up their water, for, on account of the steepness of the mountain side, it was very difficult and dangerous to descend. Hereupon the Brethren of these three Monasteries came together to the servant of God Benedict saying: "It is very troublesome to us to have daily to go down for water as far as the lake, and therefore the Monasteries must of necessity be removed to some more commodious place." He dismissed them with comfortable words, and at night with little Placidus, whom we mentioned before, went up to the rock and there prayed a long time. Having ended his prayers, he put three stones for a mark in the same place, and so unknown to all he returned to his Monastery. Next day, when the Brethren came again to him for want of water he said: "Go, and on the rock where you shall find three stones one upon another, dig a little, for Almighty God is able to make water spring from the top of that mountain, that you may be eased of this labour." When they had made a hollow in that place, it was immediately filled with water, which issueth forth so plentifully that to this day it continueth running down to the floor of the mountain.

CHAPTER VI.

How the iron head of a bill from the bottom of the water returned to the handle again.

AT another time, a certain Goth poor of spirit, desirous to lead a religious life, repaired to the man of god, Benedict, who most willingly received him. One day he ordered a bill to be given to him to cut up brambles in a place which he intended for a garden. This place, which the Goth had undertaken to accommodate, was over the lake's side. While the Goth laboured amain in the cutting up the thick briars, the iron, slipping out of the handle, fell into the lake in a place so deep, that there was no hope to recover it. The Goth, having lost his bill, ran trembling to the Monk Maurus, and told him the mischance, confessing his fault penitently, who presently advertised Benedict the servant of God thereof. Immediately the man of God came himself to the lake, took the haft out of the Goth's hand, and case it into the lake, when, behold, the iron rose up from the bottom and entered into the haft as before. Which he there rendered to the Goth saying: "Behold! work on and be not discomforted."

CHAPTER VII.

How his disciple Maurus walked on the water.

ONE day as venerable Benedict was in his cell, the aforesaid young Placidus, a Monk of the holy man, went out to the lake to fetch water, and letting down the bucket to take up water, by chance fell in himself after it, and was presently carried away by the stream, a bow's shoot from the side. This accident was at the same time revealed to the man of God in his cell, who quickly called Maurus, saying: "Run, brother Maurus, for the child who went to fetch water is fallen into the lake, and the stream hath carried him a great way." A wonderful thing and not heard of since the time of Peter the Apostle! Maurus having asked and received his benediction, upon the command of his Superior went forth in haste, and, being come to the place to which the child was driven by the stream, thinking still he went upon the dry land he ran upon the water, took him by the hair of the head, and returned speedily back. No sooner had he foot upon firm ground but he came to himself, and perceiving that he had gone upon the water, much astonished, he wondered how he had done that which wittingly he durst not adventure. So, returning to his Superior, he related what had happened, which the venerable man Benedict ascribed to Maurus his prompt obedience, and not to his own merits; but contrariwise Maurus attributed it wholly to his command, not imputing any virtue to himself in that which he had done unwittingly. This humble and charitable contention, the child who was saved, was to decide, for he said: "When I was drawn out of the water, methought I saw my Abbot's garments over my head and imagined that he had drawn me out."

PETER.

These are wonderful things you report, and may be to the edification of many: for my own part, the more I drink of this good man's miracles, the more I thirst.

CHAPTER VIII.

Of the poisoned loaf which the crow carried away.

WHEN, as now, the places far and wide were very zealous in the love of our Lord God Jesus Christ, many abandoning the vanities of the world and putting themselves under the sweet yoke of our Redeemer; as it is the custom of the wicked to repine at the virtues of others, which themselves desire not to follow, one Florentius, the Priest of a Church hard by, and grandfather to Florentius our subdeacon, began by the instigation of the devil to be envious of the virtuous proceedings of the holy man, to derogate from his course of living hindering also as many as he could from resorting to him. But seeing that he could not stop his progress, the fame of his virtues still more increasing, and many upon the report of his sanctity reforming their lives daily, he became more and more envious, and constantly grew worse, for he desired himself the commendations of Benedict's life, but would not live commendably. Thus, blinded with envy, he sent to the servant of Almighty God a poisoned loaf for an offering, which the man of God received thankfully, although he was not ignorant of the poison in it. There used to come to him at the time of dinner a crow from the next forest, which took bread from his hand. Coming therefore, as she was wont, the man of God came before her the bread that the Priest had sent him, saying: "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ take this bread and cast it in some place where no man may find it." The crow, gaping and spreading her wings, ran croaking about it, as though she would have said, I would willingly fulfil thy

command, but I am not able. The man of God commanded again saying: "Take it up, take it up, and cast it where no man may find it." So at length the crow took it up in her beak and flew away with it and three hours after returned again to receive from his hand her ordinary allowance. But the venerable Father, seeing the Priest so perversely bent to seek his life, was more sorry for him than grieved for himself. When the aforesaid Florentius saw that he could not kill the body of his master, he attempted what he could against the souls of his disciples, in so much that he sent seven naked girls into the garden of the Cloister where Benedict lived, that so playing for a long time hand in hand, they might entice their souls to naughtiness, which when the holy man espied out of his cell, to prevent the fall of his younger disciples, and considering that all this was done only for the persecuting of himself, he gave place to envy, and after he had disposed of the Oratories and other buildings, leaving in them a competent number of Brethren with Superiors, he took with him a few monks and removed to another place. Thus the man of God with humility avoided his hatred, whom Almighty God struck with a terrible judgment: for when the aforesaid Priest, standing in his summer house, heard to his great joy, that Benedict was gone, the room wherein he was fell down and crushed and killed the enemy of Benedict, al the rest of the house remaining immovable. This Maurus, the disciple of the man of God, thought fit to signify forthwith to the venerable Father Benedict, who was yet scarce gone ten miles saying: "Return for the Priest that did persecute you is slain." Which the man of God hearing took very heavily, both because his enemy was dead and because his disciple rejoiced thereat. Whereupon he enjoined him a penance for presuming in a joyful manner to bring such news to him.

PETER.

These are wonderful strange things which thou sayest. For in the drawing water our of a rock methinks I behold in him Moses; in raising the iron from the bottom of the water he representeth Eslius; in walking on the water Peter; in the obedience of the crow I conceive him another Elias; in bewailing his enemy's death I see David. In my opinion, this man was filled with the spirit of all the just.

GREGORY.

The man of God, Benedict, had in him, Peter, the spirit of god alone, which by the grace of free redemption replenished the hearts of all the elect, of which St. John saith: "There was true light which Illuminateth every man that cometh into this world." Of which again it is written: "Of his plentitude and fulness we have all received." For the holy ones of God could indeed receive graces from God, but they could not impart them to others. He then gave signs of power to the lowly, who promised that He would shew the miracle of Jonas to His enemies, deigning in their sight to die, and in the sight of the humble to arise. So that the one should have what they would contemn, and the other what reverence and love. By which mystery it came to pass, that while the proud were spectators of His ignominious death, the humble contrariwise, against death, lay hold of the power of His glory.

PETER.

But declare, I pray, whither the holy man removed or if he wrought miracles in any other place?

GREGORY.

The holy man by removing changed his habitation, but nor his adversary. For afterwards he endured so much the more grievous battles, by how much he had now the master of wickedness fighting openly against him. The castle called Casino is situated upon the side of a high mountain, which containeth as it were, in the lap thereof, the same castle, and riseth into the air three miles high so that the top seemeth to touch the very heavens: on this stood an old temple where Apollo was worshipped by the foolish country people, according to the custom of the ancient heathens. Round about it, likewise, grew groves, in which even until that time, the mad multitude of infidels offered their idolatrous sacrifices. The man of God coming to that place brake down the idol, overthrew the altar, burnt the groves, and, of the temple of Apollo, made a chapel to St. Martin, and, where the profane altar had stood, he built a chapel of St. John; and, by continual preaching, converted many of the people thereabout. But the old enemy not bearing this silently, did present himself, not covertly or in a dream but openly and visibly in the sight of the Father, and with great cries complained of the violence he suffered, in so much that the brethren heard him though they could see nothing. For, as the venerable Father told his disciples, the wicked fiend represented himself to his sight all on fire, and, with flaming mouth and flashing eyes, seemed to rage against him. And, then, they all heard what he said, for, first, he called him by his name, and, when the man of God would make him no answer, he fell to reviling him. And whereas before he cried: "Benedict, Benedict," and saw he could get no answer, then he cried: "Maledict, nor Benedict, what hast thou to do with me, and why dost thou persecute me?" But now we shall behold new assaults of the old enemy against the servant of God, against whom willingly did he make war, but against his will did he give him occasions of many victories.

CHAPTER IX.

How the man of God by his prayer, removed a huge stone.

ONE day, as the brethren were building the cells of the Cloister, there lay a stone in the midst which they determined to lift up and put into the building. When two or three were not able to move it, they set more to it, but it remained as immovable as if it had been held by roots to the ground, so that it was easy to conceive that the old enemy sat upon it, since that so many men were not able to lift it. After much labour in vain, they sent to the man of God to help them with his prayers to drive away the enemy, who presently came, and having first prayed, he gave his blessing, when behold the stone was as easily lifted as if it had not weight at all.

CHAPTER X.

Of the fantastical fire which burned the kitchen.

THEN the man of God thought good that they should dig in that place. When they had entered a good deepness, the Brethren found a brazen idol, which happening for the present to be cast in the kitchen, suddenly there seemed a flame to rise out of it, and, to the sight of all the Monks it appeared that all the kitchen was on fire. As they were casting on water to quench this fire, the man of God, hearing the tumult, came, and perceiving that there appeared fire in the eyes of the Brethren and not in his, he forthwith bowed his head in prayer, and calling upon those whom he saw deluded with an imaginary fire, he bade them sign their eyes that they might behold the kitchen entire, and not those fantastical flames which the enemy had counterfeited.

CHAPTER XI.

How a boy crushed by the fall of a wall was healed by the servant of God.

AGAIN, when the Brethren were raising the wall a little higher for more convenience, the man of God was at his devotions in his cell, to whom the old enemy appeared in an insulting manner and told him he was going to his Brethren at work; the man of God straightway by a messenger advertized the Brethren thereof saying: "Brethren, have a care of yourselves, for the wicked spirit at this hour is coming to molest you." Scarce had the messenger told his errand when the malignant spirit overthrew the wall that was abuilding, and with the fall thereof crushed a young monk, son to a certain Senator. Hereat all of them much grieved and discomfited, not for the loss of the wall but for the harm to their brother, brought the heavy tidings to their venerable Father Benedict, who bid them bring the boy to him, who could not be carried but in a sheet, by reason that not only his body was bruised but also his bones crushed with the fall. Then the man of God willed them to lay him in his cell upon his mat where he used to pray; so causing the Brethren to go out he shut the door, and with more than ordinary devotion fell to his prayers. A wonder to hear, the very same hour he sent him to his work again, whole and sound as ever he was before, to help his Brethren in making up the wall; whereas the old enemy hoped to have had occasion to insult over Benedict for his death.

CHAPTER XII.

Of Monks who had eaten our of their monastery.

Now began the man of God, by the spirit of prophecy, to foretell things to come, and to certify those that were present with him of things that passed far off. It was the custom of the Monastery that the Brethren, sent abroad about any business, should neither eat nor drink anything outside their Cloister. This in the practice of the Rule being carefully observed, one day some Brethren upon occasion went abroad, and were forced to stay later than usual, so they rested and refreshed themselves in the house of a certain devout woman of their acquaintance. Returning late to the Monastery, they asked, as was the custom, the Abbot's blessing, of whom he straightway demanded,

saying: "Where dined you?" they answered: "Nowhere." To whom he said: "Why do you lie? Did you not go into such a woman's house? Eat you not there such and such meats? Drank you not so many cups?" When the venerable Father had told them both the woman's lodging, the several sorts of meats, with the number of their draughts, they, in great terror fell down at his feet, and with acknowledgment of all that they had done confessed their fault. But he straightway pardoned them, persuading himself they would never afterwards attempt the like in his absence knowing he was always present with them in spirit.

CHAPTER XIII.

How he reproved the brother of Valentinian the Monk for eating by the way.

MOREOVER, the brother of Valentinian, the Monk, whom we mentioned in the beginning, was very devout although but a secular; and he used to go to the Monastery from his dwelling once every year and that fasting, that he might partake of the prayers of the servant of God, and see his brother. As he was on his way to the Monastery, another traveller, who carried meat with him, put himself into his company. After they had travelled a good while, he said to him: "Come, Brother, let us refresh ourselves, lest we faint by the way." "God forbid!" answered the other, "by no means, Brother, for my custom is always to go to the venerable Father Benedict fasting." At which answer, his fellow-traveller, for the present, said no more; but, when they had gone a little further, he moved him again to eat, but he would not consent because he resolved to keep his fast. So the other was awhile silent, and went forward with him without taking any thing himself. After they had gone a great way, wearied with long travel, in their way they came to a meadow and a spring, with what else might delight them, there to take their repast. Then said his fellow-traveller: "So! Here is water, here is a meadow, here is a pleasant place for us to refresh and rest us awhile, that we may safely make an end of our journey." So, at the third motion, these words pleasing his ear and the place his eye, he was overcome, consented and ate. In the evening he came to the Monastery, where, conducted to the venerable Father Benedict, he craved his prayers, but soon the holy man reproved him for what he had done in the way, saying: "What was it, Brother, the malignant enemy suggested to thee by thy fellow traveller? The first time he could not persuade nor yet the second, but the third time he prevailed and obtained his desire." Then the man acknowledging his fault fell at his feet, and began all the more to weep and to be ashamed, by reason that he perceived he had offended, although absent, in the sight of Father Benedict.

PETER.

I discover in the breast of the holy man the spirit of Eliseus, who was present with his disciple though far from him.

CHAPTER XIV.

How he discovered the dissimulation of King Totila.

GREGORY.

YOU must, Peter, for a little while be silent, that you may know matters far more important. For, in the time of the Goths, their king, informed that the holy man had the gift of prophecy, went towards his Monastery and made some stay a little way off, and gave notice of his coming. To whom answer was made from the Monastery that he might come at his pleasure. The king, being of a treacherous nature, attempted to try whether the man of God had the spirit of prophecy. There was one of his guards called Riggo, upon whom he caused his own buskins to be put and so commanded him taking on him the king's person to go forward to the man of God, three of his chief pages attending upon him, to wit Vulderic, Ruderic and Blindin, to the end they should wait upon him in the presence of the servant of God, that so, by reason of his attendants and purple robes, he might be taken for the king. When the said Riggo, with his brave apparel and attendance, entered the cloister the man of god sat a little distance off, and seeing him come so nigh as he might hear him, he cried to him, saying: "Put of, son, put off that which thou carriest, for it is not thine." Riggo straightway fell to the ground and was much afraid, for having presumed to delude so holy a man; all his followers likewise fell down astonished, and rising, they durst not approach unto him, but returned to their king, and trembling related unto him how soon they were discovered.

CHAPTER XV.

How he prophesied to king Totila and to the Bishop of Canosa.

THEN Totila came himself to the man of God, whom as soon as he saw sitting afar off, he durst not come nigh, but fell prostrate to the ground. The holy man twice of three bade him rise, but he durst not get up, then Benedict, the servant of Jesus Christ our Lord, deigned himself to come to the prostrate king, whom, raising from the ground, he rebuked for his deeds, and foretold in a few words all that should befall him saying: "Much evil dost thou do, and much wickedness hast thou done, as least now give over thy iniquity. Into Rome shalt thou enter, thou wilt cross over the sea, nine years shalt thou reign, and die the tenth," At the hearing whereof, the king sore appalled, craved his prayers and departed, but from that time he was less cruel. Not long after he went to Rome, sailed thence to Sicily, and in the tenth year of his reign, by the judgment of Almighty God, lost both crown and life,

Moreover, the Bishop of the Church of Canosa used to come to the servant of God, who much loved him for his virtuous life. He, therefore, conferring with him concerning the coming of king Totila and the taking of the City of Tome, said; "The city doubtless will be destroyed by this king, so that it will never more be inhabited." To whom the man of God replied: "Rome shall never be destroyed by the Pagans, but shall be so shaken by tempests, lightnings and earthquakes that it will decay of itself." The mysteries of which prophecy we now behold as clear as day, for, in this city, we see the walls ruined, houses overturned, churches destroyed by tempuesuous winds, and building

rotten with old age decay and falling into ruins, Although Honoratus, his disciple, from whose relation I had it told me he heard it not himself from his own mouth by was told it by the Brethren.

CHAPTER XVI.

How venerable Benedict dispossessed a certain clerk from the Devil.

At that time one of the clergy of the church of Aquin was molested with an evil spirit, whom the venerable man, Constantius, Bishop of that Diocese, had sent to divers martyrs' shrines to be cured; but the holy martyrs would not cure him, that the gifts of grace in Benedict might be mad manifest. He was therefore brought to the servant of Almighty God, Benedict, who, by pouring forth prayers to our Lord Jesus Christ, presently drove out the enemy. Having cured him, he commanded him, saying: "Go! And hereafter never eat flesh, and presume not to take Holy Orders, for what time soever you shall presume to take Holy Orders, you shall again become a slave to the devil." The Clerk therefore went his way healed, and as present punishments make deep impressions, he carefully for a while observed the man of God's command. But when, after many years, all his seniors were dead and he saw his juniors preferred before him in Holy Orders, he neglected the words of the man of God, as though forgotten through length of time, and took upon him Holy Orders; whereupon, presently, the devil, who before had left him, took power of him, and never ceased to torment him till he severed his soul from his body.

PETER.

This holy man, I perceive, understood the secret decrees of God, in that he knew this Clerk to be delivered to the power of the devil, lest he should presume to receive Holy Orders.

GREGORY.

Why should not he know the secret decrees of Divine Providence, who kept the commandments of God, since it is written that "he who adhereth to God is one spirit with Him."

PETER.

If he who adhereth to our Lord become one spirit with Him, how comes the same excellent Preacher to say: "Who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counsellor?" For it seem altogether unlikely that he, who is made one with another, should not know his mind.

GREGORY.

Holy men, so far as they are united with God, are not ignorant of His meaning, for the same Apostle saith; "For what man knoweth the things of a man, but the spirit of a man that is in him? So the things also, that are of God, no man knoweth but the spirit of God." And to shew that he knew things of God, he addeth; "But we have not received the spirit of this world, but the spirit which is of God." And again: "That eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it ascended into the heart

of man, what things God hath prepared for those that love Him, but to us God hath revealed by His spirit.”

PETER.

If then those things which appertained to God were revealed to the said Apostle by the spirit of God, what meaneth he to make this preamble, saying: “O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God; how incomprehensible are his judgments and His says unsearchable.” But as I am saying this, another question arises: for the Prophet David says to our Lord; “With my lips I have uttered all the judgments of Thy mouth.” And, whereas, it is less to comprehend or know than to pronounce, what is the reason that St. Paul should affirm the judgments of God to be incomprehensible, while David professeth not only to know them but also to pronounce them with his lips?

GREGORY.

To both these difficulties — I briefly answered before, when I said: that holy men, as far as they are one with god, are not ignorant of the mind of our Lord, for all such as do devoutly follow the Lord are also by devotion one with God; and yet, in that they are laden with the burden of this corruptible flesh, they are not with God. Therefore, for as much as they are untied with God they know His secret judgments, of which likewise they are ignorant for as much as in respect separated from Him: and so they pronounce His judgments incomprehensible which they cannot as yet thoroughly understand. But they who in spirit adhere to Him, in this adhesion know His judgments, either by the sacred words of Scripture, or by hidden revelations, as far as they are capable; these therefore they know and declare, but they are ignorant of those which God concealeth. Whereupon the prophet David when he had said: “In my lips I will pronounce all Thy judgments,” as if he had said plainly: “Those judgments I could both know and pronounce with Thou didst tell me, for those which Thou speakest not, without doubt Thou concealest from our knowledge. Thus, the saying of the Prophet agreeth with that of the Apostle, for the judgment of God are both incomprehensible, and yet those which proceed from His mouth are uttered with the lips of men, for being so manifested by God they may be conceived by men, nor can they be concealed.

PETER.

By occasion of the difficulty I propounded, I have obtained a clear solution. But if there remain aught concerning the virtue of this man, I pray you declare it.

CHAPTER XVII.

How he prophesied the destruction of his Monastery.

A CERTAIN nobleman, named Theoprobus, was by the admonition of Father Benedict converted, and for the merit of his life was very familiar and intimate with him. He one day entered into the cell of the man of God, found him weeping bitterly; when he had waited a good while and saw he did

not give over, (though it was his custom in prayer mildly to weep and not to use any doleful lamentations) he boldly demanded of him the cause of so great grief. To whom the man of God presently replied: "All this Monastery which I have built, with whatsoever I have prepared for my Brethren, are, by the judgment of almighty God, delivered over to the heather; and I could scarce obtain to save the lives of those in this place. His words Theoprobus heard, but we see them verified in the destruction of his Monastery by the Longobards. For of late these Lombards, by night, when the Brethren were at rest, entered the Monastery and ransacked all, yet had not the power to lay hand on any man. But Almighty God fulfilled what he had promised to His faithful servant, Benedict, that although he gave their goods into the hands of the Paynims, yet he preserved their lives. In this Benedict did most clearly resemble St. Paul, whose ship with all its goods being lost, yet, for his comfort, he had the lives of all that were in his company bestowed upon him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

How St. Benedict discovered the hiding of a flagon of wine.

OUR monk Exhilaratus, whom you know well, on a time was sent by his master with two wooden vessels (which we call flagons) full of wine, to the man of God in his Monastery. He brought one but hid the other in the way, notwithstanding, the man of God, although he was not ignorant of anything done in his absence, received it thankfully, and advised the boy as he was returning back, in this manner: "Take care, son, thou drink not of that flagon which thou hast hid, but turn the mouth of it downward and then thou wilt perceive what is in it." He departed from the holy man much ashamed, and desirous to make further trial of what he had heard, held the flagon downwards, and presently there came forth a snake, at which the boy was sore affrighted and terrified for the evil he had committed.

CHAPTER XIX.

How the man of God reprov'd a Monk for receiving certain napkins.

NOT far distant from the monastery was a certain town in which no small number of people, by the exhortations of Benedict, were converted from the worship of idols to the faith of God. In that place were certain religious women, and the servant of God, Benedict, used to send often some of his Brethren thither to instruct and edify their souls. One day, as his custom was, he appointed one to go; but the Monk who was sent, after his exhortation, by the entreaty of the Nuns, took some small napkins and hid them in his bosom, As soon as he came back, the man of God began very sharply to rebuke him, saying; "How hath iniquity entered thy breast?" The Monk was amazed, and because he had forgotten what he had done, he wondered why he was so reprehended. To whom the holy Father said: "What! Was not I present when thou tookest the napkins of the handmaids of God and

didst put them in thy bosom?" Whereupon he presently fell at his feet, and repenting of his folly threw away the napkins which he had hid in his bosom.

CHAPTER XX.

How the man of God understood the proud thought of one of his Monks.

ONE day as the venerable Father late in the evening was at his repast, it happened that one of his Monks, the son of a lawyer, held the candle to him; and whilst the man of God was eating, he standing in that manner, began by the suggestion of pride to say within himself, "Who is he whom I should wait upon at table, or hold the candle unto with such attendance? Who am I who should serve him?" To whom the man of God presently turning, checked him sharply saying: "Sign thy breast, Brother, what is this you say? Sign thy breast." Then he forthwith called upon the Brethren and willed them to take the candle out of his hand, and bade him for that time to leave his attendance and sit down quietly by him. The Monk being asked afterward of the Brethren concerning his thoughts at that time, told them how he was puffed up with a spirit of pride, and what he spake against the man of god secretly in his own heart. By this it was easily to be perceived that nothing could be kept from the knowledge of venerable Benedict, in whose ears the words of unspoken thoughts resounded.

CHAPTER XXI.

Of two hundred measured of meal found before the man of God's cell.

AT another time also in the country of Campania began a great famine, and all people suffered from great scarcity of food, so that all the wheat in Benedict his Monastery was spent, and likewise almost all the bread, so that but five loaves remained for the Brethren's refecton. When the venerable Father perceived them sad, he endeavoured by a mild and gentle reproach to reprehend their pusillanimity, and with fair promises to comfort them, saying: "Why is your soul sad for want of bread? To day you are in want but to-morrow you shall have plenty." The next day there were found two hundred sacks of meal before the Monastery gates, by whom God Almighty sent it as yet no man knoweth. Which when the Monks beheld, they gave thanks to God, and by this were taught in their greatest want to hope for plenty.

PETER.

Tell me, I pray you, is it to be thought that this servant of God had continually the spirit of prophecy, when himself pleased, or only at certain times with some discontinuance.

GREGORY.

The spirit of prophecy, Peter, doth not always cast his beams upon the understanding of the Prophets, for as it is written of the Holy Ghost: "He breatheth where He will." So likewise must we conceive, also, when He pleaseth. And, therefore, Nathan being asked by the king if he might build the Temple, first allowed him to do it, and afterwards forbade him. This was the reason that Eliseus knew not the cause why the woman wept but said to his servant who did oppose her: "Let her alone for her soul is in anguish, and the Lord hath concealed it from me and hath not made it known." Thus Almighty God of His great mercy so disposeth in His providence, tot he end that by giving the spirit of prophecy sometimes, and at other times withdrawing it, the minds of the Prophets be both humility, for by receiving the spirit they may know they are inspired by God, and again they receive it not, they may consider what they are of themselves.

PETER.

It standeth with good reason what you have said. But, I beseech you, prosecute what else you remember of the venerable Father Benedict.

CHAPTER XXII.

How by a vision, he gave order to construct
The Monastery of Terracina.

At another time, he was requested by a certain devout man to send some of his disciples to build a Monastery on his estate near the city of Terracina. To which request he consented, and sent some Monks, appointing an Abbot and Prior over them. As they were setting forward, he promised, saying: "Go, and upon such a day I will come and shew you where to build the Oratory, where the Refectory and lodging for the guests, or what else shall be necessary." So they received his blessing and departed, in hope to see him at the appointed day, for which they prepared all things they thought fit and necessary for their Gather and his company. The night before the appointed day the man of God appeared in sleep to him whom, he had constituted Abbot and to his Prior, and described to them most exactly how he would have the building ordered. When they awaked, they related to each other what they had seen, yet not altogether relying upon that vision, they expected the man of God according to his promise, but seeing he came not at his appointed time, they returned to him very pensive, saying: "We have expected, Father, your coming, as you promised, but you came not to shew us where and what we should build." To whom he said: "Why, Brethren, why do you say so? Did not I come according to my promise?" And when they said: "When came you?" he replied: "Did I not appear to each of you in your sleep and describe every place? Go, and according to the direction given you in that vision construct the Monastery." Hearing this they were much astonished, and so, returning to the manor, they erected the whole building according to the revelation.

PETER.

I would gladly be informed how and in what manner he could express his mind to them so far off, so they should both hear and understand by an apparition.

GREGORY.

What is the reason, Peter, thou dost so curiously search out the manner how it was done? It is evident that the spirit is of more mobile nature than the body. And we are taught by Scripture how the Prophet was taken up in Judea and set down, with the dinner he carried, in Chaldea, and, after he had refreshed another Prophet with his dinner, found himself again in Judea. If then Habacuc in a moment could corporally go so far and carry his dinner, what wonder if father Benedict obtained to go in spirit and intimate to the spirits of his Brethren what was necessary; that as the other went corporally to convey corporal food, so he might go in spirit to inform them of things concerning a spiritual live?

PETER.

I confess that by this your discourse you have given full satisfaction to my doubtful mind; but I would gladly know what kind of man he was in his common conversation.

CHAPTER XXIII.

How certain Religious women were absolved

After their death.

GREGORY.

Even his ordinary discourse, Peter, had a certain efficacious virtue, for his heart being elevated in contemplation, he would not allow a word to pass from his mouth in vain. If at any time he spake aught, yet not as one that determined what was best to be done, but by way of threatening, his words had the same force as if he had absolutely decreed it. For, not far from his Monastery, two Nuns of noble race and parentage lived in a place of their own: and a certain Religious man provided them with all things for their exterior. But as in some, nobility of birth causeth baseness in mind, so those, who bear in mind their own greatness do less humble themselves in this world. There aforesaid Nuns had not, as yet, refrained their tongues by a Religious habit, but by their unadvised speeches, oftentimes provoked to anger the Religious man who had care over them. Wherefore, after he had for a long time endured their contumelious language, he complained to the man of God of the injuries he suffered. Which as soon as he heard he commanded them forthwith, saying: "Have a care of your tongues, for if you do not amend I excommunicate you." Which sentence of excommunication notwithstanding, he did not pronounce by threaten. Yet for all this, they nothing changed in their former conditions. Within a few days after they departed this life, and were buried in the Church. At such time as a Solemn Mass was sung, and the Deacon, as the custom is, cried aloud: "If there by any that communicateth not, let him go forth," then their nurse, who used to make offerings to our Lord for them, saw them rise out of their graves and go forth. This she often

observed, that, when the Deacon cried in that manner, they went out, not able to remain in the Church, and, calling to mind what the man of God had said to them whilst they were living, (for he excluded them from communion unless they amended their language and manners) she, with great sorrow, informed the servant of god what she had seen. He presently with his own hands gave the offering saying: “Go and cause this oblation to be offered to our Lord, and they shall be no longer excommunicated.” When therefore, this offering was made, and the Deacon, according to custom, cried out that such as did not communicate should go out of the Church, they were not seen to go forth any more. Whereby it was apparent that, whereas they went not forth with the excommunicated, they were admitted by our Lord to communion.

PETER.

It is marvellous strange that this man, although venerable and most holy, as yet living in the mortal body, should be able to release those who were standing at the invisible tribunal.

GREGORY.

And was not he, Peter, yet in this flesh who heard; “Whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth shall be bound also in Heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed also in Heaven.” Whose place and authority in binding and loosing they possess, who, by faith and virtuous life, obtain the dignity of holy government. And that man, and earthly creature, might receive this power, the Creator of Heaven and earth came down from Heaven to earth and that flesh might judge of spiritual things He became man for the redemption of mankind. For god thus condescending beneath Himself raised our weakness above itself.

PETER.

For the virtue of his miracles your words do yield a very good reason.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Of a boy who was cast out of his grave.

GREGORY.

UPON a certain day, a young Monk of his, who was over-much affected towards his parents, went from the Monastery to their abode without his benediction, and the very same day, as soon as he was come to them he died. The day following his burial they found his body cast up, which they inferred the second time, and the next day after it was found in like manner lying above ground as before. Hereupon they ran straight way and fell at the feet of the most mild Father Benedict imploring his aid, to whom the man of God with his own hand gave the communion of the Lord’s Body saying: “Go, and lay the Body of the Lord upon his breast and so bury him.” This done, the earth dept his body, and never after cast it up. You perceive, Peter, of what merit this man was with our Lord

Jesus Christ, sith the very earth cast forth the body of him who had not received the blessing of Benedict.

PETER.

I do plainly perceive it, and am much astonished thereat.

CHAPTER XXV.

Of the Monk, who leaving his Monastery
met a dragon in the way.

ONE of his Monks of a wandering and inconstant disposition, would by no means abide in the Monastery. Although the man of god had often reprov'd and admonish'd him of it, he would in no wise consent to remain in the congregation, and often entreated earnestly to be released. So the venerable Father, overcome with his importunity in anger bade him begone. Scarce was he got out of the Monastery, when he met in the way a dragon who, with open mouth made towards him. Seeing it ready to devour him, he began to quake and tremble, crying out aloud: "Help, help, for this dragon will devour me." The Brethren upon this ran out, yet saw no dragon, but took the panting and afrighten'd Monk back again to the Monastery, who forthwith promised never to depart and from that time he remained always constant in his promise. He, by the prayers of the holy man, was made to see the dragon ready to devour him, which before he had followed unperceived.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Of the boy cured of the Leprosy.

BUT I must not pass over in silence what I heard of a very honourable man named Anthony, who affirmed that a servant of his father fell into a leprosy, insomuch that his hair fell off, and his skin was swollen so that he could not longer hide the increase of his disease. Who being sent by the gentleman's father to the man of God, he was by him quickly restored to his former health.

CHAPTER XXVII.

How St. Benedict miraculously procured money
For a poor man to discharge his debt.

NOR will I conceal that which his disciple Peregrine was wont to relate: how, on a certain day, an honest man, constrained by the necessity of a debt, thought his only remedy was to have recourse

to the man of god, and acquaint him with his necessity. So he came to the Monastery, where finding the servant of Almighty God, told him how he was extremely urged by his creditor for the payment of twelve shillings. The venerable father answered him that, in very deed, he had not twelve shillings, but yet he comforted his want with good words, saying: "Go, and after two days return hither again for today I have it not to give thee." These two days, as his custom was, he spent in prayer, and, on the third day, when the poor debtor came again, thirteen shillings were found upon a chest of the Monastery that as full of corn. These the man of God caused to be brought to him, and gave them to the distressed man, saying that he might pay twelve, and have one to defray his charges.

But to return to those things which I learned of his disciples of whom I spoke in the beginning of this book, there was a certain man had an adversary who bore him deadly hatred, and so great was his malice that he gave him poison in his drink; which potion, although it procured not his death, yet so altered his colour that his body became all speckled lake a leper. This man was brought to the man of God and was quickly restored to his former health; for as soon as he touched him, the diversity of colours vanished from his skin.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

How a bottle was cast down upon the
Stones and not broken.

At such time as the great famine was in Campania, the man of god gave all he had in his Monastery to those in want, insomuch as there was almost nothing left in the cellar save only a little oil in a glass vessel. When one Agapitus, a Subdeacon, came earnestly entreating to have a little oil given him, the man of God (who had resolved to give all upon earth that he might have all in Heaven) commanded this little oil that was left to be given him. The Monk, who was Cellarer, heard his command but was loath to fulfil it. And the holy man a little while after demanded whether he had done what he willed him, and the Monk answered that he had not given it, because if he had given it, there would be nothing left for the Brothers. Hereat, much displeased, the good father bade some other take the glass bottle in which there remained a little oil, and cast it out of the window, to the end that nothing of the fruits of disobedience might remain in the Monastery. This was accordingly done; under the window was a steep fall, full of huge rough stones, upon which the glass fell, yet it remained as whole and entire as if it had not been thrown down, so that neither was the glass broke nor the oil spilt. Then the man of God commanded it to be taken up and given to him that asked it. Then calling the Brothers together, he rebuked the disobedient Monk before them all for his pride and unfaithfulness.

CHAPTER XXIX.

How an empty barrel was filled with oil.

HAVING ended the Chapter, he and all the Brethren fell to their prayers. In the place where they prayed was an empty oil-barrel close covered. As the holy man continued his prayer, the cover of the said tun began to be heaved up by the oil increasing under it, which ran over the brim of the vessel upon the floor in great abundance. Which so soon as the servant of God, Benedict, beheld, he forthwith ended his prayer, and the oil ceased to run over. Then he admonished the distrustful and disobedient brother to have confidence and learn humility. So the brother thus reprehended was much ashamed, because the venerable Father had by his admonition and by his miracle shewn the power of Almighty God, nor could anyone afterwards doubt of what he promised, since, as it were in a moment, for a glass bottle almost empty, he had restored a tun full of oil.

CHAPTER XXX.

How he delivered a Monk from the devil.

ONE day as he was going to St. John's Oratory, which stands upon the very top of the mountain, he met the old enemy upon a mule, in the habit and comportment of a physician, carrying a horn and a mortar; who, being demanded whither he went, answered he was going to the monks to minister a potion. So the venerable Father Benedict went forward to the chapel to pray, and, having finished, returned back in great haste, for the wicked spirit found one of the ancient Monks drawing water, and presently he entered into him, threw him on to the ground and tortured him pitifully. As soon as the man of god, returning from prayer, found him thus cruelly tormented, he only gave him a blow on the cheek with his hand, and immediately drove the wicked spirit out of him, so that he durst never after return.

PETER.

I would know whether he obtained these great miracles always by prayer, or did them some times only by the intimation of his will?

GREGORY.

They who are perfectly united with God, when necessity requireth, work miracles both ways, sometimes they do wonders by prayer, sometimes by power. For since St. John saith: "As many as received Him, to them He gave power to become sons of God." What wonder is it if they have the privilege and power to work miracles who are exalted to the dignity of children of God. And that they work miracles in both ways is manifest in St. Peter, who by prayer, raised Tabitha from death, and punished with death Ananias and Sapphira for their falsehood. For we do not read that he prayed when they fell down dead, but only that he rebuked them for their fault committed. It is evident therefore that these things are done sometimes by power, sometimes by petition; since that by reproof he deprived these of their life, and by prayer revived the other.

But now I will produce two other acts of the faithful servant of God, Benedict, in which it shall clearly appear that some things he could do by power received from Heaven, and others by prayer.

CHAPTER XXXI.

How a country man was loosed by only the
sight of the man of God.

A CERTAIN Goth named Galla was of the impious sect of the Arians, and he, in the time of their king Totila did, with such monstrous cruelty, persecute religious men of the Catholic Church, insomuch that if any cleric or monk came in his sight, he was sure not to escape from his hands alive. This man enraged with an insatiable covetousness of spoil and pillage, lighted one day upon a husbandman whom he tortured with cruel torments. The rustic, overcome with pain, professed that he had committed his goods to the custody of the servant of God, Benedict. This he feigned that he might free himself from torments and prolong his life for some time. Then this Galla gave over tormenting him, and tying his arms together with a strong cord, made him run before his horse to shew him who this Benedict was, that had received his goods. Thus the man went in front, having his arms bound, and brought him to the holy man's Monastery, whom he found sitting alone at the Monastery gate reading. Then the countryman said to Galla, who followed furiously after him: "See! this is Father Benedict whom I told you of." The barbarous ruffian, looking upon him with enraged fury, thought to affright him with his usual threats, and began to cry out with a loud voice, saying: "Rise, rise and deliver up this rustic's goods which thou hast received." At whose voice the man of God suddenly lifted up his eyes from reading, and saw him and also the countryman whom he kept bound: but, as he cast his eyes upon his arms, in a wonderful manner the cords began to fall off so quickly, that no man could possibly have so soon untied them.

When Galla perceived the man whom he brought bound, so suddenly loosened and at liberty, struck into fear at the sight of so great power, he fell prostrate, and bowing his stiff and cruel neck at the holy man's feet, begged his prayers. But the holy man rose not from his reading but called upon the Brethren to bring him to receive his benediction. When he was brought to him, he exhorted him to leave his barbarous and inhuman cruelty. So, vanquished, he departed, never after presuming to ask anything of the countryman, whom the man of God unloosed not by touching but by casting his eye upon. Thus you see, Peter, as I said, that those who are the true servants of Almighty God, sometimes do work miracles by a commanding power, for he who sitting still abated the fury of that terrible Goth and with his only look unloosed the cords wherewith the innocent man's arms were fast pinioned, sheweth, evidently, by the swiftness of the miracle, that he wrought it by a power received. Now I will also shew you how great and strange a miracle he obtained by prayer.

CHAPTER XXXII.

How he raised a child from the dead.

As he was one day in the field labouring with his Brethren, a certain peasant came to the Monastery, carrying in his arms the dead body of his son, and pitifully lamenting his loss, asked for the holy Father Benedict. When they said that he was in the field, he presently laid down the dead body of

his son at the Monastery gate, and, as one distracted with grief, began running to find out the venerable father. At the same time the man of God was coming home with his Brethren from labouring in the field, whom, when the distressed countryman espied, he began to cry out: Restore me my son, restore me my son." But the man of God amazed at this voice said: "What! have I taken you son from you?" To whom the man replied: "He is dead, come and raise him." When the servant of God heard this he was much grieved, and said: "Go, Brethren, go! This is not a work for us, but such as were the holy Apostles. Why will you impose burdens upon us which we cannot bear?" Notwithstanding, the man enforced with excessive grief, persisted in his petition, swearing that he would not depart unless he raised his son to life. Then the servant of God enquired, saying: "Where is he?" He answered: "Lo! his body lieth at the Monastery Gate." Whither, when the man of God with his Brethren was come, he knelt down and laid himself on the body of the child; then, raising himself and with his hands held up towards Heaven, he prayed: "O Lord, regard not my sins, but the faith of this man who craveth to have his son restored to life, and restore again to this body the soul which thou hast taken from it." Scarce had he finished these words, but all the body of the boy began to tremble at the re-entry of the soul, so that in the sight of all who were present he was seen with wonderful quaking to pant and breathe. Whom he presently took by the hand and delivered alive and sound to his father.

It seemth to me, Peter, he had not this miracle actually in his power, which he prostrated himself to obtain by prayer.

PETER.

What you have said is undoubtedly true, because you prove by deeds what was said in words. But I pray, certify me, whether holy men can effect and obtain whatsoever they will or desire?

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Of the miracle wrought by his sister Scholastica.

GREGORY.

WHO was ever, Peter, in this life more sublime than St. Paul, who, notwithstanding, three times craved of our Lord to be free from the pricks of the flesh, yet could not obtain it? To this purpose, I must tell you a passage concerning the venerable Father Benedict, that there was something he desired and was not able to accomplish.

His sister Scholastica, who was consecrated to God from her very childhood, used to come once a year to see him; unto whom the man of god was wont to go to a house not far from the gate, within the possession of the Monastery. Thither she came one day according to her custom, and her venerable brother likewise with his disciples: where, after they had spent the whole day in the praise of God and pious discourses, the night drawing on, they took their reflection together. As they were yet sitting at table, and protracting the time with holy conference, the religious woman, his sister, entreated him saying: "I beseech you, leave me not this night, that we may talk until

morning of the joys of the heavenly life.” To whom he answered: “What is this you say, sister? by no means can I stay out of my Monastery. At this time the sky was serene, and not a cloud was to be seen in the air. The holy woman, therefore, hearing her brother’s refusal, clasped her hands together upon the table, and bowing her head upon them she prayed to Almighty God. As she raised up her head from the table, there began such vehement lightning and thunder, with such abundance of rain, that neither venerable Benedict nor his Brethren were able to put foot out of doors. For the holy woman when she leaned her head upon her hands, poured forth a flood of tears upon the table by which she changed the fair weather into foul and rainy. For, immediately after her prayers, followed the inundation, and the two did so concur that, as she lifted up her head, the crack of thunder was heard, so that in one and the same instant she lifted up her head and brought down the rain. Then the man of god perceiving that, by reason of thunder and lightening with continual showers of rain, he could not possibly return to his monastery, was sad and began to complain, saying: “God Almighty forgive you, sister, what is this you have done?” To whom She mad answer: “I prayed you to stay and you would not hear me; I prayed to Almighty God and he heard me! Now, therefore, if you can, go forth to the Monastery and leave me.” But he not able to go forth, was forced to stay against his will.

Thus it fell out that they spent the night in watching, and received full content in spiritual discourse of heavenly matters. By this it appears, as I said before, that he desired something which he could not obtain; for if we consider the mind of the venerable man, he would, without doubt, have had the fair weather to continue in which he set out. But, contrary to what he willed, he found a miracle worked by the courage of a woman in the strength of Almighty God. And no wonder if at that time a woman were more powerful than he, considering she had long desired to see her brother. For according to the saying of St. John: “God is charity,” and with good reason she was more powerful who loved more.

PETER.

I confess that I am wonderfully pleased with that which you tell me.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

In what manner St. Benedict saw the soul

Of his sister go forth from her body.

GREGORY.

THE next day, the venerable woman returned to her Cloister and the man of God to his Monastery. When, behold, three days after, while standing in his cell, he saw the soul of his sister depart out of her body, and, in the form of a dove, ascend and enter into the celestial mansions. Who rejoicing much to see her great glory, gave thanks to God Almighty in hymns and praises, and announced her death to the Brethren. Whom he forthwith sent to bring her body to the Monastery, and caused

it to be buried in the same tomb that he had prepared for himself. By means of which it fell out, that as their minds were always one in God, so also their bodies were not separated in their burial.

CHAPTER XXXV.

How the whole world was represented before his
Eyes: and the soul of Germanus, Bishop of Capua.

ANOTHER time, Servandus, Deacon and Abbot of that Monastery which was built by Liberius, sometime a senator, in the Campania, used often to visit him, for being also illuminated with grace and heavenly doctrine, he repaired divers times to the Monastery that they might mutually communicate one to another, and, at least with sighs and longing desires, taste of that sweet food of the celestial country whose perfect fruition they were not as yet permitted to enjoy. When it was time to go to rest, venerable Benedict went up to the top of the tower in the lower part of which servandus the Deacon had his lodging, and from which there was an open passage to ascend to the higher. Over against the said tower was a large building in which the disciples of both reposed. While as yet the Monks were at rest, the man of God, Benedict, being diligent in watching, rose up before the night office and stood at the window making his prayer to Almighty God about midnight, when suddenly, looking forth, he was a light glancing from above, so bright and resplendent that it not only dispersed the darkness of the night, but shined more clear than the day itself. Upon this sight a marvellous strange thing followed, for, as he afterwards related, the whole world, compacted as it were together, was represented to his eyes in one ray of light. As the venerable Father had his eyes fixed upon this glorious lustre, he beheld the soul of Germanus, Bishop of Capua, carried by angels to Heaven in a fiery globe. Then, for the testimony of so great a miracle, with a loud voice he called upon Servandus the Deacon, twice or thrice by his name, who, troubled at such an unusual crying out of the man of God, came up, looked forth, and saw a little stream of light then disappearing, and wondered greatly at this miracle. Whereupon the man of God told him in order all that he had seen, and sent presently to Theoprobus, a Religious man in the town of Casino, ordering him to go the same night to Capua, and learn what had happened to Germanus the Bishop. It fell out so, that he who was sent found the most reverend Bishop Germanus dead, and on enquiring more exactly, he learned that his departure was the very same moment in which the man of God has seen him ascend.

PETER.

A wonderful thing and much to be admired, but, whereas you said that the whole world, as it were, under one sunbeam, was represented to his sight, as I never experienced the like, so I cannot imagine how or in what manner this was possible that the whole world should be seen of any one man.

GREGORY.

Assure yourself, Peter, of that which I speak: that in a soul that beholdeth the Creator, all creatures appear but narrow; for, should we partake never so little of the light of the Creator, whatsoever is created would seem very little; because the soul is enlarged by this Beatific vision, and so dilated in the Divine Perfections, that it far transcends the world and itself also. The soul thus rapt in the light of God is in her interior lifted up, and enabled above itself, and while thus elevated it contemplates itself, and it easily comprehendeth how little that is which before it was not able to conceive. So the blessed man who saw the globe of fire with the Angels returning to Heaven could not possibly have beheld those things but only in the light of God. What wonder then if he saw the world at one view who was in mind exalted above the world? But whereas I said that the whole world compacted as it were together was represented before his eyes, it is not meant that heaven and earth were straitened by contraction, but that the mind of the beholder was dilated, which, rapt in the sight of God might, without difficulty, see all that is under God. Therefore, in that light which appeared to his outward eyes, the inward light which was in his soul ravished the mind of the beholder with higher things, and shewed how mean are all inferior things.

PETER.

I perceive that it was to my profit that I understood you not before, for my slowness has been the occasion of so long and profitable a discourse. But, since you have clearly explained these things to me, I beseech you continue your former narration.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

How he wrote a Rule for Monks.

I WOULD willingly, Peter, relate many things concerning this venerable Father, but some of purpose I omit, because I hasten to speak of the acts of others. Only this I would not have you to be ignorant of, that the man of God, among so many miracles wherewith he shined to the world, was also eminent for his doctrine, for he wrote a Rule for Monks both excellent for discretion and eloquent in style. Of whose life and conversation if any wish to know further, he may in the institution of that Rule understand all his manner of life and discipline, for the holy man could not possibly reach otherwise than he lived.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

How he prophetically foretold his death

To his Brethren.

THE same year in which he departed out of this life, he foretold the day of his most holy death to some of his disciples who conversed with him, and to others who were far off, giving strict charge to those who were present to keep in silence what they had heard, and declaring to the absent by

what sign they should know when his soul departed out of his body. Six days before his departure he caused his grave to be opened, and immediately after he fell into a fever, by the violence whereof his strength began to wax faint, and the infirmity daily increasing, the sixth day he caused his disciples to carry him into the Oratory, where he did arm himself for his going forth by receiving the body and Blood of the Lord; then, supporting his weak limbs by the hands of his disciples, he stood up, his hands lifted towards Heaven, and with words of prayer at last breathed forth his soul. The same day two of his Brethren, the one living in the Monastery and the other in a place far remote, had a revelation in one and the self-same manner. For they beheld a way, spread with garments and shining with innumerable lamps, stretching directly eastwards from his cell up to Heaven; a man of venerable aspect stood above and asked them whose way that was. But they professing they knew not, he said to them: "This is the way by which the beloved of the Lord, Benedict, ascended." Thus the disciples who were present knew of the death of the holy man, and so also those who were absent understood it by the sign foretold them. He was buried in the Oratory of St. John the Baptist which he himself had built upon the ruins of Apollo's altar.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

How a mad woman was cured in his cave.

In the cave in which he formerly lived in Subiaco, even to this day, miracles are wrought upon such as repair thither with true faith. For very lately happened that which I now relate. A certain woman bereft of reason, and altogether distracted in her senses, roamed over mountains and valleys, through woods and fields by day and night, never resting, except when forced from weariness to lie down. One day, as she raged thus madly up and down, she lighted upon the cave of blessed Benedict, and by chance entered and remained there. The next morning she came out as sound and perfect in her senses as if she had never been out of them, and from that time remained all her life in the health which she had there recovered.

PETER.

What should be the reason that we experience, even in the patronage of martyrs, that they do not bestow so great favours by their bodies as by their relics: yea, and do greater miracles where themselves be not?

GREGORY.

Where the bodies of holy martyrs lie, no doubt, Peter, but there they are able to shew many miracles, as they do; for to such as have recourse unto them, with pure mind, they shew many marvellous favours. But forasmuch as weak souls might doubt whether they be present to hear them or no in those places where their bodies be not, it is necessary to shew more miracles where weak souls may doubt of their presence. For they whose minds are fixed in God have so much the greater merit of faith, that though their bodies lie not there, yet they be there present to hear our prayers. Wherefore Truth Itself to increase the faith of His disciples said: "If I go not away the Paraclete

will not come unto you.” For whereas it is certain, that the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, always proceedeth from the Father and the Son; why doth the Son say that He will go from them that the Paraclete may come, who never departeth from the Son? But because the Disciples beholding our Lord in the flesh, did desire always to behold Him with their corporeal eyes, it was rightly said unto them: “Unless I go away the Paraclete will not come.” As if He had said plainly: If I withdraw not My bodily presence, I do not shew you the love of the Spirit; and, unless you cease to see Me carnally, you will never learn to love spiritually.

PETER.

What you say pleaseth me.

GREGORY.

Let us now for a while cease our discourse, that by silence we may be the better enabled to prosecute the miracles of other saints.

THE END.

CHRONOLOGY
OF THE
LIFE OF THE MOST HOLY PATRIARCH
SAINT BENEDICT

(from Haften's Disgnis. Monast.)

"His memory shall not depart away; and his Name shall be in request from generation to generation."
(Ecclus. 39)

(The figures in parenthesis denote the age of St. Benedict.)

YEAR.

480. (—) St. Benedict and his twin-sister St. Scholastica are born in Nursia, a town in the south of Italy: their Father, Anicius Eupropius: their Mother, Abundantia.
487. (7.) St; Benedict is sent to tome to study, his nurse Cyrilla accompanies him.
493. (13.) God, calling him to higher things, and the dangers of the world prompting him to leave it, he quits Rome to seek salvation and perfection in solitude. On their way in a little village, 30 miles from Rome, he works a miracle to console Cyrilla.
494. (14.) He leaves Cyrilla and goes alone to Subiaco, a mountainous district, 40 miles distant from Rome: meets a holy Hermit named Romanus, from whom he asks and receives the Religious Habit: then going into a little Cave amidst the rocks, dwells there in union with his God in prayer, unknown to all, excepting St. Romanus who brought him food.
497. (17.) On the Easter Sunday of this year, a Priest receives a command from God to visit this Cave, and honour the youthful hermit.
Some neighbouring Shepherds discover the Saint.
He gains the noble victory over the spirit of impurity and placing the lily of his Chastity amidst thorns and nettles, he secures it against every temptation for the remainder of his life.
509. (29.) His sanctity becoming noised abroad many men leave the world, and put themselves under his spiritual guidance.

510. (30.) After frequent refusals he, at last, yields to the request of the Monks of Vico-Varro, who besought him to become their Abbot. As he had foretold them they grew angry at his corrections; they seek to poison him: he returns to his dear solitude of Subiaco.
St. Maurus is born.
511. (31.) During the next 19 years St. Benedict builds 12 monasteries on the Subiaco mountains.
515. (35.) St Placid is born.
522. (42.) Sts. Maurus and Placid are brought to Subiaco by their Parents, and receive from St. Benedict the Monastic Habit.
523. (43.) St. Maurus in obedience to St. Benedict walks on the waters of the lake, into which St. Placid had fallen, and saves him from being drowned.
529. (49.) St. Benedict leaves Subiaco, and goes to Mount Cassino (about 50 miles south of Subiaco).
530. (50.) He begins to build the Monastery of Mount Cassino.
536. (56.) He sends St. Placid into Sicily.
St. Benedict has the mysterious vision, in which God grants him the sight of the whole world, brought together in one ray of the sun.
537. (57.) St. Placid begins the Monastery at Messina in Sicily: he finishes it in 4 years.
539. (59.) During a famine St. Benedict distributes to the poor all the corn of the Monastery: on the following day he receives from Heaven, in return, 200 bushels of flour.
In hatred of Disobedience and out of love for Charity he works the miracle of the glass oil-jar. Whilst he is at prayer with some of his Brethren, an empty vessel which was in the room is miraculously filled with oil, even to over-flowing.
541. (61.) St. Placid is martyred (probably in this year).
543. (63.) King Totila the Barbarian visits St. Benedict: receives his paternal reproach and prophecy.
On the 10th of January, St. Benedict sends St. Maurus into France.
On the 6th of February, he sees the soul of his Sister, St. Scholastica, ascending to heaven under the form of a Dove.
On the 16th of March, knowing that the hour of his Death is near he orders his grave to be opened.
On the 21st of March at 3 o'clock in the morning, standing in the chapel of his Monastery of Mount Cassino, supported by his Religious, he dies, in the 63rd year of his age.