



SAINT BENEDICT, ABBOT.

THE  
L I F E  
OF  
Saint Benedict,

Patriarch of the Western Monks.

*Translated from the Second Book of the Dialogues of  
St. Gregory the Great, Supreme Pontiff,*

BY P. AURELIUS McMAHON, O. S. B.

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PERMISSU SUPERIORUM.

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## TO THE DEVOUT READER.

THE author of this little book, St. Gregory the Great, Supreme Pontiff, was born in 540, about three years previous to the death of Saint Benedict. As the entire Catholic world was then filled with the praises of the great Abbot, St. Gregory, sharing the general enthusiasm, resolved to write the life of the man he so much admired. The work, though small in size, has been praised in all succeeding generations. And no wonder; for its every chapter and page and line is redolent of piety, of unction and of the spirit of God. If its perusal serves to edify and make the heroic virtues of Saint Benedict still more widely known, the Translator will consider himself to have received ample recompense.

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THE LIFE  
OF  
SAINT BENEDICT;

*From the second book of the Dialogues of  
St. Gregory the Great, Supreme Pontiff.*



THERE was (in our time) a man most venerable for the holiness of his life, named Benedict, and whom this appellation suited exceedingly well; for he was *blessed* of God and abundantly endued with His graces. From his earliest youth he possessed the heart and wisdom of old age. For even then, more sedate in his manners than is

usual at that period of life, he followed not the allurements of sensuality, gave not way to pleasure, and permitted himself no worldly enjoyment. While yet in this land of exile he despised the world with all its empty show and deceitful riches, although he had every opportunity of enjoying them as much as can be in this life; and he viewed them as a withered and barren tree from which no fruit may be expected. Being of a very respectable family in the vicinity of Nursia, his parents sent him to Rome to receive a liberal education. But seeing that many of those who studied there allowed themselves to be swept

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down the flood of vice, and although it was his first entrance into the world, he resolved to fly from it, lest, becoming infected with its false maxims, he might be cast headlong into the abyss of sin. Taking no pains then to acquire learning, he left his father's house and estate, and, aspiring only to please God, he proceeded to seek one who had the power to invest him with the religious habit.

He thus departed from Rome, having made no progress in his studies; but his behavior in this case was an effect of his understanding (as to things divine), and shows that if he was untaught (as

to human science) he was enlightened with the wisdom and with the light of the Gospel. I have not learned all his deeds, of which I will relate here only a small part, recounted to me by four of his disciples: Constantine, a very venerable man, who was his successor in charge of the Abbey of Monte Cassino; Valentine, who for many years governed the Monastery of Lateran; Simplicius, who was the third Abbot (of Monte Cassino); and Honoratus, who discharges at present the same function in the Monastery of Sublacus, the first abode of the saint.

## CHAPTER I.

OF THE FIRST MIRACLES OF ST. BENEDICT, AND HIS RETIRING TO SUBLACUS.

YOUNG Benedict having given over his studies retired into a desert. He was accompanied only by his nurse who loved him tenderly. When he reached a place called Enfide he met many respectable persons, who, through charity, engaged him to converse with them awhile and stop in the church of St. Peter.

His nurse, in the meantime, borrowed a sieve from some women of

the neighborhood to clean wheat, and when done, laid it incautiously on a table where it was accidentally broken, completely split in two. The woman having come back to the table was grieved to find the sieve broken which was only lent her, and in her sorrow, shed abundant tears. The pious and tender-hearted Benedict beholding her thus weeping was moved to compassion, and, to console her, took the two pieces of the sieve aside. There he prayed to God with fervent tears and his petition was granted; for no sooner had he risen from the ground than he found the sieve so perfectly

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sound that there remained not the slightest trace of its having been broken. He came immediately to his nurse, and, restoring the article which he had taken away broken, gently soothed her pain. This fact became known to all the inhabitants and filled them with surprise. They hung up the sieve at the entrance of their church to make known to those then living and to posterity the progress the youthful Benedict had made in grace and virtue when he commenced to walk the narrow path of perfection. This sieve was thus exhibited to the eyes of all, and remained above the entrance of the church until the inva-

sion of the Lombards. But the wise Benedict, preferring to suffer the miseries of this world than to win its esteem and praises, and to whom it appeared more profitable to undergo the most painful labors for the service of God than to enjoy the prosperity and pleasures of this life, secretly forsook his nurse and hastened to hide himself in a desert called Sublacus, about fourteen or fifteen leagues from Rome. In this solitude is to be found an abundance of cool and limpid water, forming a spacious lake from which a river issues. Benedict, flying to this desert, met a monk named Romanus, who asked him whither he



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was going. The saint disclosed his mind, and Romanus, having learned his resolution, kept the secret and helped him to put it in execution; he even gave him the religious habit and did him all the kindness and service he was able. The man of God, having arrived at Sublacus, chose for his retreat a very low and narrow grotto, and there passed three years unknown to all mankind, except his trusty Romanus, who dwelt in a neighboring monastery, under the rule and guidance of the Abbot Theodatus. But on certain days, Romanus, using a pious license, withdrew unnoticed a few hours from his Abbot's pres-

ence, and issuing from the monastery, carried to the man of God pieces of bread, retrenched from his own meals. There was no path leading from Romanus' monastery to the saint's grotto, for a very high and steep ledge of rocks ran transversely between them. But Romanus, ascending at a certain point, let down a very long rope towards the grotto, to the end of which were attached the pieces of bread, with a little bell, to give notice to the saint to come and take them. This intercourse of love excited the envy of the devil. He could not endure that the monk should be so diligent in supplying the saint with what

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was necessary, nor that the saint should receive such aid from the monk; and to prevent it, seeing Romanus come one day and let down the bread with the rope, threw a stone and broke the little bell. This insult, however, did not prevent Romanus from aiding the saint in every way he thought best and most opportune.

But, at last, divine Providence willed to deliver him from this painful task, and to manifest to the world the life of his servant Benedict, that it might serve as an example, and, as a light placed on a candlestick, enlighten those who were in the house of God, which

is His church. To this end, on the feast of the Resurrection, our Lord appeared in a vision to a priest who dwelt at some distance from Sublacus and who had prepared some food for dinner, saying: "You prepare yourself delicate meats whilst my servant is dying of hunger in the desert." This good priest immediately arose, and, without being detained by the consideration of the festival, took what he had prepared and proceeded towards Sublacus. Not knowing where the saint dwelt, he sought him over almost inaccessible mountains, deep valleys, and uncultivated and pathless plains,

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until at length he found him concealed in his grotto. Having saluted him, they prayed together, then seating themselves, they continued to give God thanks and to discourse on the happiness of eternal life. This done, the venerable priest said to the saint: "May it please thee to arise from thy seat and take some food, since to-day is the feast of Easter." "I believe what thou sayest," replied the man of God, "to-day is for me the feast of Easter, since our Lord accords me the favor to behold thee." For Benedict, living quite remote from men, knew not that it was the feast of Easter. But the venerable priest

reassured him, saying: "To-day is truly Easter Sunday, the solemn festival instituted to honor the Resurrection of our Lord; for this reason you must not continue to fast. Almighty God has sent me hither that we might both partake together of this food which His bounty has provided for us." Having prayed and blessed the Lord, they sat down to their repast. After the meal a short discourse followed, which being ended, the priest returned to his church. About the same time, some shepherds tending their flocks, perceived the saint concealed in the grotto. As he was clad in skins

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of animals, and hiding in the copse, they mistook him at first for a wild beast, but discovering that it was one of God's servants, several of them reformed their lives; and as they had hitherto lived like beasts themselves, began to change their manners and obey the dictates of piety. His name became known in all the country round, and henceforth many of the inhabitants came to see him, and, carrying him food to sustain the life of the body, received from him in exchange holy instructions which they brought home in their hearts as proper food to preserve and augment the life of grace therein.

## CHAPTER II.

OF THE VICTORY WHICH ST. BENEDICT  
GAINED OVER A TEMPTATION OF THE  
FLESH.

ON a certain day when the saint was alone in his grotto, he was assailed by that spirit of darkness whom his malice has made the tempter of mankind. A small bird with dark plumage, commonly called a blackbird, began to fly around his face and approach so near as to be very troublesome. He might have warded off its attacks by seizing it with his hand, but he preferred to make the sign



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of the cross, and by this means banished the intruder. No sooner had the bird disappeared than the saint found himself beset by so violent a temptation of the flesh that he had never before experienced anything to be compared with it. The evil spirit, knowing that the servant of God had formerly beheld with some attention a woman of graceful form, recalled her to his memory, and by forming the lively image in his fancy, enkindled such a flame in his heart that the fire of love was ready to burst forth, so that yielding to the seductions of pleasure, he was almost on the point of quitting the

desert. But being speedily aided by grace from heaven, he recovered himself again, and seeing a place full of briars and nettles, put off his habit and cast himself naked into the bush. He rolled himself so long in those nettles and thorns that he came forth covered with wounds. But the scars on his body served as a remedy for those of his soul, for pleasure was thereby turned into pain; and it was most wholesome to have substituted the feeling of pain for that of pleasure, for the rankling of the wounds which he had received without extinguished the wicked flame that began to burn within. Thus by

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changing a passion which flattered into one that inflicted suffering, sin was vanquished. This victory procured him still another advantage by subduing and almost removing the sense of pleasure, so that he was no more subject to temptations of this sort, as he afterwards declared to his disciples. Henceforth many began to retire from the world and place themselves under his control and guidance; for most fit it was that being freed from this great infirmity which breeds temptation, he should become a teacher of virtue. Hereupon we may remark that Moses ordains that the Levites from the age of twenty-five

should serve at the Altar, and, on having attained their fiftieth year, be entrusted with the care of the sacred vessels.

*Peter.* I have a faint glimpse of the moral meaning of this passage of the Scriptures which you have adduced, but I request you to explain it more fully.

*Gregory.* It is evident, dear Peter, that in youth temptations of the flesh are violent, but at the age of fifty the heat of the body begins to cool and diminish greatly. The sacred vessels represent the souls of the faithful. It is then necessary that the elect, who are still exposed to tempta-

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tions, live in obedience and serve others to the end that those humble and toilsome occupations may mortify their flesh and inordinate desires. But being advanced in years, they enjoy a peace and calmness of mind so much the greater as they are not assaulted by the heat and tempest of temptations, and are employed to guard the vessels of the Lord, because they are allowed to instruct souls and become their teachers and guides.

*Peter.* What thou sayest pleases me greatly, but having explained this passage of Scripture, I beseech thee to proceed with the life of this holy man.

### CHAPTER III.

OF A GLASS THAT ST. BENEDICT BROKE  
BY MAKING OVER IT THE SIGN OF THE  
CROSS.

THE man of God, being freed from temptations, made new progress in virtue, and his soul became still more fruitful in good works, just as we see a field yielding more abundant fruit after it has been cleared of the thorns and put under cultivation. His life appeared so holy and edifying that every one eulogized it, and his name became famous through-

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out the whole country. Not far from his retreat there was a monastery whose Abbot had lately died. The whole community immediately repaired to the venerable Benedict and earnestly besought him to be their superior. For a long time he refused, alleging as an excuse that his manner of living was too different from theirs to suit each other; but at length, overcome by their importunity, he acceded to their wishes. Thus having undertaken to govern the community, he applied himself to cause the laws of monastic life to be observed; he was careful that the Religious should walk in the

strait path of their profession, giving them to understand, if any should deviate therefrom either to the right or to the left, or act in any way contrary to duty, he would not tolerate the disorder. This mode of governing did not at all please those monks. Insensate as they were, and enemies to their own best interest, they began to reproach themselves for having chosen as their superior a man whose energy and integrity would not bend to their licentious manners and cowardly relaxation. Seeing that under such an Abbot irregularity of conduct was not permitted, they grieved at being



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compelled to change their evil habits. It was hard for them and quite unsuitable to be obliged to practice a new observance after their minds had, as it were, grown old in remissness; and, in a word, because the life of the good is always incommoding to the wicked, some of those disorderly monks plotted among themselves how to get rid of the saint. Poison was the means they adopted. They mixed it with wine and presented a glass of it to the Abbot at the table that he might bless it, as was the custom of the monastery. The venerable Benedict extended his hand, made the sign of the

cross, and, by means of this holy sign, broke the glass which was held up at some distance from him, so that the glass containing the poison was as quickly broken, as if, instead of blessing it with the sign of the cross, he had flung a stone and broken it. Beholding this wonder, the man of God knew at once that the glass contained a deadly potion, since it was unable to bear the sign of life. He arose from the table, and calling the brethren around him, said with a cheerful look and perfect self-possession: "May Almighty God pardon you this, my brethren; why have you resolved to treat me

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thus? Was I not right in saying your ways were not compatible with mine? Go seek an Abbot who will conform to your dispositions, for I shall be your superior no longer." The saint then returned to his beloved solitude, and dwelt alone with himself in the presence of Him who seeth all things from on high.

*Peter.* I do not understand what is meant by these words: "The saint dwelt alone with himself."

*Gregory.* If the man of God, having in his monastery monks whose ways were so different from his own, and who had all conspired against him, had undertaken to

compel their obedience, he might be perhaps obliged to relax somewhat of that manly and vigorous observance which he had proposed to himself, and could only with great difficulty preserve that quiet and peace of soul which he formerly enjoyed; so that his spirit, which, until then, contemplated with so much profit the light of truth, would be often turned aside from this holy exercise. While tired instructing those monks and reprov- ing their short-comings, every day he would be less careful about his own conscience, he would perhaps have gone out of his own self and not found those lost sheep. For, as

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often as, by the motion of thought, we are too much removed from ourselves, we are still ourselves but we are no longer with ourselves; for ceasing to think on ourselves, we attend to other objects like a traveller who wanders from place to place. Shall we say that man was with himself who went to a distant country and there squandered the inheritance he received from his father; and, attaching himself to the service of one of the inhabitants, was employed to tend swine; who, when hungry, would gladly satiate himself with the husks those animals were eating; and who, beginning

to reflect on the patrimony he had lost, came to himself again, and, according to the Scriptures, said within himself; "*How many servants in my father's house have plenty of bread, and I here perish with hunger?*" (St. Luke, xv, 17.) If that prodigal son had been with himself (before this first impulse of repentance,) whence could he have returned to himself? (Since he came to himself he was necessarily out of himself.) I can then truly say that the venerable Abbot (on his return to Sublacus,) lived with himself, for his sole occupation was to watch over his conscience and think of his salvation; and, be-

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cause keeping himself constantly in the presence of his Creator, he continued to consider his own ways and actions, without permitting his mind to wander abroad or waste his attention on external objects.

*Peter.* How then are we to understand that passage of the Scripture wherein it is related that Peter, the Apostle, was delivered from prison by the ministry of an angel, and when he came to himself, said: "*Now I know indeed that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.*" (Acts, xii, 11.)

*Gregory.* Dear Peter, we are drawn out of ourselves in two ways; for we either fall below ourselves by the downward tendency of our mind which permits itself to be drawn down towards things beneath it; or, we are raised above ourselves by the grace of contemplation. Wherefore, he who was employed to tend the swine, fell beneath himself by the heedlessness and roving character of his mind, as also by his revelling and libertinism. But this holy Apostle, whose chains the angel had broken, was rapt in ecstasy and really went out of himself, but only to be elevated to a higher plane.



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Each of the two came to himself again; the former by forsaking his licentious conduct and entering into the recesses of his heart, and the latter by descending from the height of contemplation to his ordinary state of mind. Thus the venerable Benedict lived with himself inasmuch as he confined himself to reflect on his own actions and the care of his own salvation. But when the ardor of contemplation drew him forth from himself to contemplate the most sublime truths, he quitted his own self, but by means of a holy transport that raised him above himself.

*Peter.* I am delighted with what you say, but I beseech you to solve still another difficulty. Ought this holy man to have abandoned thus those monks whose guidance he had undertaken?

*Gregory.* Dear Peter, I believe one ought to bear with the vicious in a community when he finds therein some good souls to whom he can be an aid. But if there are no virtuous persons who can profit by our care and instruction, it would be labor badly employed to continue governing people who obstinately persevere in their disorder; and it is certainly better to spare oneself the trouble if there

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is reason to hope that by removing to some neighboring place more good can be effected, and many souls attracted thither to the service of God. Why should this holy man have remained any longer in that monastery? There were no sheep to tend; all those false brethren were become his enemies and conspired his ruin. In this affair the saint only imitated the usual conduct of the most perfect, although the cause and reasons thereof often lie hid in their interior. When they see their labor in some place is vain, they pass to another where they hope to be more successful. It is

on this account a distinguished preacher, who desired to be emancipated from the slavery of the body, saying that his life was Jesus Christ, and death a gain and advantage; who ardently desired to endure the greatest sufferings in defence of the Gospel and endeavored to inspire others with the same zeal, sought means to leave Damascus secretly, where he was persecuted, causing himself to be let down by the wall in a basket. Shall we say St. Paul dreaded death, he who protested so loudly that he desired it for the love of Jesus Christ? But seeing from the then condition of affairs at Damas-

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cus that he could not exercise his ministry there without much difficulty and with very little fruit for his pains, he withdrew, thus reserving himself to labor elsewhere with more utility and success. This valiant athlete of Christ, engaged to combat for the interest of God, could not endure to be hemmed in by the walls of this city, and so issued forth to another field of battle. The same may be said of the venerable Benedict; and, since you listen with pleasure to the recital of some of his worthy deeds, you will acknowledge by and by that if he abandoned his false brethren whom their obdurate

hearts rendered unable to profit by his instructions, it was that he might proceed to convert in other places, a much greater number of souls whom he won from the death of sin to the life of sanctifying grace.

*Peter.* The light of right reason and the example of St. Paul which you have cited so *apropos*, shed a clear light on the soundness of your decision, but I pray you still to proceed to recount the deeds of so illustrious a father.

*Gregory.* The holy man having returned to Sublacus, long continued to shine by his virtue and miracles, and assembled a great

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number of solitaries who consecrated themselves to the service of God. So that with the aid of our Lord Jesus Christ, he built twelve monasteries, placing in each twelve Religious, with an Abbot to govern them. He retained with himself only a few of his disciples, who, he thought, still needed his presence to be better formed to perfection. It was at this time that many persons in Rome, conspicuous for their nobility and virtue, began to visit him and offer their children that he might mould them to piety, and teach them to live for God alone. Aequitius and Tertullus, who had the honor of being Roman Patri-

cians, came to see the saint and confided to his care their two sons, children of great promise; the former offered his son Maurus, and the latter his son Placidus. Maurus was distinguished for spotless innocence of life, and merited, though young, to be chosen by his master to assist him in his functions. As to Placidus, being only a boy, he was subject to the foibles inseparable from tender age.





## CHAPTER IV.

OF THE MANNER IN WHICH ST. BENE-  
DICT RECLAIMED AN UNSTEADY MONK.

**I**N one of the monasteries which the saint had built around his solitude, there was a monk who could not stay in his place to pray with the rest; for as soon as the brethren began to apply themselves to this holy exercise, he walked out of the church and occupied his mind with earthly and fleeting objects. He continued to busy himself in this sort. Frequently did the Abbot chide him for this most

serious defect; but seeing it made no impression on his mind, he sent him to the man of God. The saint severely rebuked his folly and urged him to change his conduct. Having received this reprimand, the monk returned to his own monastery, but hardly two days had elapsed before he forgot the saint's warning; for on the third day he resumed his old habit and began again to walk out of the church at the time of prayer. The Abbot, who had received his office from the servant of God, gave him notice, and the saint, in reply, said he would set out to the monastery himself and punish

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him. He went according to promise and assisted at the divine office. The monks having chanted the psalms at due time, betook themselves to prayer, and, at this moment, the saint, casting his eyes on this monk who could not remain praying with the others, noticed a little boy, perfectly black, who was drawing him by the hem of his robe out of the church. Then he whispered to Pompeian, the Abbot of the monastery, and to Maurus, servant of God: "Do you not see who is drawing that monk out?" They replied, they saw not the person referred to. "Let us have recourse to prayer,"

said the saint, "that you also may see him whom the monk is following." Having prayed two days, Maurus, servant of God, perceived the black boy, but the Abbot Pompeian did not. On one of the following days when prayer was ended, the man of God hastened out of the church and found the monk indulging in his ill habit of standing without. The saint, knowing his blindness of heart, seized a rod and struck him. Henceforth the black boy enticed him no more to retire from the exercise of prayer, and the monk applied himself with the rest without leaving his place,

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so that the old enemy no longer dared approach to take possession of his mind; but appeared cowed and humiliated, as if he himself received the stripes inflicted by the saint on his disciple.



## CHAPTER V.

OF A SPRING OF WATER WHICH THE  
SAINT, BY HIS PRAYERS, PRODUCED  
ON A MOUNTAIN.

OF the monasteries which the  
saint built, three were situ-  
ated on the rocks of mountains.  
It was a painful task for the monks  
to be obliged to come down every  
day to the lake to fetch water.  
This labor incommoded them all  
the more as it was accompanied  
with danger, and they were afraid  
of falling when coming down, as  
the declivity was very steep. The

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brethren of these monasteries assembling together, went to Saint Benedict and said: "It is very fatiguing for us to be forced to come down every day to the lake for water, and it is therefore necessary to change the site of our monasteries." The saint having heard their complaints, consoled them in gentle language and dismissed them in peace. The following night he repaired to the rocks with the little Placidus, of whom we have already spoken, and there spent a long time in supplication. Having finished his prayer, he marked the place with three stones and returned to his

monastery, the religious knowing nothing of what he had done. The same brethren coming to him again to represent how inconvenient it was to have no water near, he replied: "Go and scoop out a small cavity in the rock where you see it marked with three stones, for Almighty God can make water flow from the mountain top to spare you the fatigue of so long a journey." The monks having gone to that part of the rocky ledge pointed out by Benedict, found it already moist, and there made an excavation which immediately filled with water. The water has continued to issue from



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the rock, and it still flows at this very day in so great abundance that it forms a copious stream hastening down the mountain side to the adjacent valley.



## CHAPTER VI.

OF THE HOOK THAT FROM THE BOTTOM  
OF THE LAKE UNITED ITSELF WITH  
THE HANDLE.

ON another occasion, a certain Goth, a man of much simplicity, presented himself to Saint Benedict to become a monk, and the man of God most gladly received him among his disciples. One day the saint ordered a hook to be given him to cut some bush and thorns occupying a place intended for a garden. The place given him to clear was situated on

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the border of a lake, and as he worked with might and main, the iron slipped off the handle and flew into the lake whose water was so deep that there could be no hope of recovering the lost blade. The Goth seeing his iron lost, went, trembling with fear, to the monk Maurus and told him the loss the monastery sustained and underwent penance. Maurus made the matter known at once to Benedict, the servant of God, who, as soon as he had heard it, went to the shore. He took the handle from the Goth and immersed it a little in the water. Immediately the blade returned from the bottom of

the lake and adjusted itself to the handle. The hook having been thus restored, Benedict returned it to the Goth, saying: "Take thy hook, go to work and trouble thyself no further."



## CHAPTER VII.

OF MAURUS' WALKING ON THE WATER.

THE venerable Benedict being one day in his cell, the boy Placidus, one of his religious, went out to fetch water from the lake, but when dipping his pitcher into the water, not taking sufficient heed, his body followed the vase and he fell into the lake. The waves immediately bore him out from the land as far as the usual flight of an arrow. The saint, who was in his cell, knew the sad accident at the very instant, and at

once calling Maurus, his disciple, said to him: "Brother Maurus, run with all speed; the boy who went to fetch water fell into the lake and has been already carried off a long distance." A thing wonderful and unheard of since that instance of the Apostle Peter! Maurus having asked and received the blessing, ran to the lake to execute the order of his Abbot. Thinking he was treading upon dry land, he advanced to the very place whither the waves had carried off the child, and, laying hold of him by the hair, brought him back with great haste to the shore. Having reached the land, he be-

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gan to reflect on what he did, and, casting a look behind, saw he had been running over the waves. He was astonished thereat and sore affrighted, seeing that he had performed what he could not dare to undertake if he was aware of what he was doing. Having returned to the monastery, he narrated the whole occurrence to the Abbot. The venerable Benedict did not attribute this miracle to his own merit, but to the obedience of the disciple. Maurus, on the other hand, said he was only fulfilling a command, and could have no share in a miracle which he unconsciously performed. During this pious dis-

pute, arising from the humility of the holy Abbot and his disciple, the boy rescued from peril presented himself as umpire, and put an end to the contest thus: "When I was being drawn out of the waves I saw the Abbot's robe of skin above my head, and it seemed to me that it was he who delivered me from the water."

*Peter.* The things you recount are most important and will contribute to the edification of many. As for me, the more you relate of the miracles of this holy man, the more I love to listen.



## CHAPTER VIII.

OF THE POISONED BREAD WHICH A RAVEN CAST AWAY IN A REMOTE PLACE BY ORDER OF ST. BENEDICT.

THE communities which the saint had established in various parts of the desert, proving by their piety that they had nothing at heart but the love of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, many people of the world were moved to forsake it; and, banishing from their hearts feelings of pride and presumption, came to submit themselves to the yoke of the Lord. But as the

wicked have a habit of envying others the benefits and happiness of virtue, although they claim it not themselves, Florence, priest of a church in the vicinity, grandfather of Florence, our sub-deacon, instigated by the spirit of evil, began to thwart the saint's designs. To this end he impugned his discipline and mode of living, prejudiced as many as he could against him and dissuaded them from coming to visit him. But seeing that he opposed in vain his pious undertakings, and that the esteem in which his regular observance and mode of governing were held increased daily, and numbers of

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the faithful induced to repent and reform their lives, his envy waxed much more violent thereat; for he longed to have the same reputation as the saint without having the slightest wish to improve his conduct, or to comport himself in a manner that might justly earn for him public esteem. In a word, this black envy diffused so much darkness through his soul that he hesitated not to send to the servant of God some bread infected with poison. The man of God received it with thanks, but the poison concealed therein did not escape him; it was immediately detected. During his repast he usually had

by him a raven which flew from the neighboring wood. The raven being present, as was its wont, the servant of God threw the bread to it, saying: "In the name of Jesus Christ take this bread and cast it in a place where no mortal can find it." Then the raven, opening its bill and spreading its wings, began to flutter around the bread, croaking, as if it distinctly said it greatly desired to obey but could not execute the order given. But the man of God said again and again: "Take, take this bread without fear, and go cast it in a place where no one can find it." The raven still hesitated, but at

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last, seizing it in its beak, carried it off and disappeared. It went to cast away the bread according to the order given, and returned three hours after to receive from the saint the food he was accustomed to give it. As for the rest, the venerable father, knowing this priest hated him to the extent of attempting his life, was much more concerned about the miserable man's sin than his own danger. But Florence having tried in vain to kill the master's body, undertook to ruin the souls of his disciples. The means he employed to accomplish this was to introduce seven young girls, perfectly naked, into

the garden of the saint's monastery. When these shameless persons arrived, linking hands, they disported long to enkindle in the hearts of the monks the flame of impure desires. The holy man, beholding them from his cell, fearing they might make some of his youngest and weakest disciples commit sin, and aware that Florence perpetrated this infamy in order to torment him, preferred to submit to envy and withdraw. He installed, therefore, a prior and some brethren in the oratories which he had erected, and, having provided them suitable dwellings, departed with a small number of

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disciples and established an abode elsewhere. The holy man thus, in his humility, withdrew to shun the hatred and insolence of Florence; but this bad priest was terribly overtaken by the divine vengeance. For while he received the news of the saint's departure as he sat in his gallery and manifested the liveliest joy thereat, the rest of the house remaining firm, the gallery gave way and fell, crushing the saint's enemy beneath its ruins. His disciple Maurus, considering it his duty to convey the news to the venerable Father Benedict, who was not yet distant more than three or four leagues from Sublacus, dis-

patched a messenger to overtake him and say: "Father, return; the priest who persecuted you is no more." The news greatly afflicted the man of God; either because he felt the deplorable death of his enemy, or saw his disciple rejoice thereat, and gave vent to loud sobs and lamentations. His sorrow also appeared by his imposing a penance on this monk to punish him; since by being so prompt to send such a message he showed that he had the presumption to triumph in the death of an enemy.

*Peter.* In sooth, you relate surprising things which cannot be heard without wonder. I seem to



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behold in this Abbot a second Moses, who makes water gush from the hard entrails of the rock. The iron he ordered up from the bottom of the lake recalls to my mind the prophet Eliseus; his disciple who treads the surface of the waves reminds me of the Apostle Peter. I see another Elias in the obedience rendered him by the raven, and a second David in the grief he felt for the death of an enemy; whence I conclude that this holy man was filled with the spirit of all the Just.

*Gregory.* The man of God, Benedict, had only one spirit, the same that, through the grace of redemp-

tion, has filled the hearts of all the elect according to the saying of St. John: "*He was the true light that enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world,*" (1 John, i, 16;) and of whom it is again written: "*Of his plentitude we have all received,*" (Ibid, 16;) for these holy men could receive from God the gift of miracles, but could not impart it to others. Our Lord favored His faithful servant with these gifts, but to His enemies He promised only the sign of Jonas. He vouchsafed to die in the presence of the proud, but He made known His resurrection only to the humble; so that the former beheld only what

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their pride deemed worthy of contempt, and the latter had the consolation to see what justly claimed their respect and love. Hence it came to pass by this mystery that while the proud considered only the shame and ignominy of death, the humble received a glorious power against death itself.

*Peter.* I entreat thee to inform me whither the holy man retired and whether he wrought any miracles there.

*Gregory.* This holy man changed his abode but not his enemy, and had to sustain a combat so much the more violent as he found the chief and author of all malice who

attacked him openly. The village of Cassinum is situated on the slope of a high mountain that opens thereto its bosom and forms a plain on which this village is built. The mountain is moreover fully one league in height. There was an old temple on the summit where, according to old pagan custom, the benighted and senseless peasants still adored Apollo. Moreover groves were to be seen in the vicinity where an infatuated crowd of villagers used to offer abominable sacrifices. When the saint arrived there, he broke the idol, overturned the altar and burned those groves of supersti-

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tion. He built a chapel in honor of Saint Martin on the site of the temple of Apollo, and another, under the name of Saint John the Baptist, in the very spot wherein stood the altar of this false divinity, and preaching incessantly and instructing the heathens, he won them gently to the faith. But the ancient enemy of man, Satan, could not in silence endure the ruin of his empire. He presented himself before the saint, not in any way disguised, nor in a vision, but manifest to sight, and complained with loud cries that he suffered violence, so that even the monks heard his voice, although they saw

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not the form in which he appeared to the Abbot. For, as the venerable father told his disciples, this furious enemy appeared to him in a frightful shape and all on fire, threatening him with mouth and eyes from which flames were issuing. Each one heard what he was saying to the saint. First he called him by his name, and the man of God answering nought, he became violently abusive, heaping upon him insults and maledictions. For when he shouted: "Benedict, Benedict," and received no answer, he immediately added: "O thou *accursed* and not *blessed*, what quarrel hast thou with me

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that thou dost persecute me thus?" But fresh attacks of this old enemy on the servant of God are now to be expected; for his evil will urged him to this war, but it was against his will that he gave his adversary an opportunity to win victories.



## CHAPTER IX.

OF A HUGE STONE WHICH WAS REMOVED  
BY THE AID OF THE SAINT'S PRAYERS.

ONE day, as the monks were erecting the walls of the monastery, there was a stone hard by which they wished to place in the building. Two or three being unable to remove it, several others came to assist them, but the stone remained as immovable as if it were profoundly rooted in the earth. This made them think the devil was seated thereon, since it could not be even stirred by so



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many hands. To overcome this difficulty they sent to the man of God that he would vouchsafe to come and banish the enemy by his prayers, so that they might succeed in lifting the stone. The saint came immediately, prayed and gave his blessing, whereupon the stone was lifted as easily as if it had before no weight at all.



## CHAPTER X.

### OF THE APPARENT BURNING OF THE KITCHEN.

IT seemed good to the man of God to dig deeper in the very spot which the stone had occupied. Then having hollowed out a pit to a considerable depth, they discovered a bronze idol which they threw in the kitchen to let it lay there for a time. But after the statue was put there a fire appeared which flamed out in view of all the monks and seemed to burn and reduce the whole edifice

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to ashes. The religious began to extinguish the flames with water, and, in their eagerness, made great bustle and noise. The saint having heard it, came, and not seeing the flames which appeared to the eyes of his disciples, immediately bowed his head in prayer. Then calling to him those whom he perceived to be alarmed by a fire existing only in appearance, he ordered them to make the sign of the cross on their eyes that they might be able to see the kitchen was uninjured by the flames, and cease to behold a fire which was only imaginary, an illusion formed by Satan.

## CHAPTER XI.

OF A MIRACLE WHICH THE SAINT PERFORMED TO RESTORE A YOUNG MAN TO LIFE WHO HAD BEEN CRUSHED BY THE FALLING OF A WALL.

THE brethren being occupied in raising a wall, for it was necessary to raise it a little higher, the man of God applied himself to prayer. While thus engaged, the ancient enemy of man appeared in order to disturb and insult him, and haughtily said he was going to visit the brethren that were at work. The saint immedi-

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ately warned the religious by dispatching a messenger to say from him: "My brethren, look well to yourselves, for the spirit of evil is hastening towards you even now." These words had hardly reached their ears when Satan threw down the wall on which they were employed, burying a little novice, son to a court officer, beneath the ruins. The monks felt not so much concern about the destruction of the wall, but the fate of their little brother profoundly grieved them, and they conveyed the news at once to the venerable Benedict with every manifestation of grief. The saint ordered the boy thus utterly

crushed to be brought to him. To execute this command it was necessary to put the dead boy in a sack, for the body was not merely pressed down under the ruins and the principal members broken, but the quantity and weight of the stones had crushed even the bones in pieces. The body having been brought, the saint had it set down in his cell on a mat of rushes, the same that he used at prayer. He then bade the brethren to withdraw, and, having closed his cell, prayed with great fervor. And now behold a wonder! the boy found himself in perfect health and full vigor, and the saint at once

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sent him back to work, so that he finished the wall with the rest of the brethren, to the confusion of the old enemy, who thought his death would supply him with an occasion for heaping insults and reproaches on the holy Abbot.



## CHAPTER XII.

OF THE MONKS WHO TOOK THE LIBERTY  
TO EAT OUTSIDE OF THE MONASTERY.

**A**MID these wonders the man of God appeared also endowed with the spirit of prophecy and began to foretell future events and declare to those around him what was passing elsewhere. It was the custom of the monastery that monks going abroad should not eat or drink outside of the cloister. This point of regular observance being scrupulously kept as the rule prescribes, it once happened that



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some brethren went forth on business and were obliged to remain absent much longer than they expected. Knowing there was a devout woman residing near the place where they stopped, they came to her house and there took a refec-tion. They returned very late to the monastery and went to the holy Abbot to get the blessing. The saint enquired where they had eaten. They replied: "Nowhere." Whereupon he said: "Why do you lie in that way; did you not enter the house of such a woman; have you not eaten such and such things; have you not drunk several times?" As the venerable father pointed out

the house and the woman, as also the quality of the food and how many drinks they had taken, acknowledging themselves guilty, they fell down trembling at his feet and confessed they had been derelict to duty. The saint, on seeing their repentance, pardoned them with the hope they would never again do any such thing in his absence, since they experienced he was present with them in spirit.



## CHAPTER XIII.

OF THE BROTHER OF VALENTINIAN, THE  
MONK, WHOM SAINT BENEDICT REPRI-  
MANDED FOR HAVING EATEN IN THE  
WAY.

THE monk Valentinian, already mentioned, had a brother who was only a layman, but very pious and devout. This man used to come every year to the monastery, as well to receive the blessing of the servant of God as to see his brother. He came fasting and without having eaten anything. On a certain day, having set out

to go to this holy place, he was joined by another traveller who had taken some victuals along. When the day was far advanced, his companion addressed him, saying: "Brother, let us partake of some food, lest our strength fail us." "God forbid," replied the other, "I will do no such thing, for I always fast when I visit the venerable Father Benedict." The other, hearing this reply, remained silent for some time, but after they had walked another long distance, he reminded him again that he ought to take some nourishment; the other did not acquiesce, for he had imposed it as a law upon him-

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self to go fasting to the monastery. The companion who had invited him to eat let the matter drop for the moment and condescended to accompany him fasting somewhat further, but finally, both having proceeded far and being well tired, they found a meadow and a fountain and every suitable thing they could desire to repose and refresh their bodies. Then he who carried the food remarked to his comrade: "Here is water, here is a meadow, here is an enchanting spot to take a light refecton and repose which will enable us to continue our journey and arrive in good condition at our destination." These gentle

words flattered the ears of his companion, while the beauty of the spot delighted his eyes and invited him to stay awhile; he surrendered to the third invitation, and they refreshed themselves together. Then resuming his journey, he reached the abbey in the evening. He presented himself to the venerable Father Benedict and asked his blessing. But the holy man at once upbraided him with what he had done on the way, saying: "Whence comes it, brother, that the spirit of malice who has spoken to thee by the mouth of thy companion could extort nothing from thee the first and second time, but

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won thy consent on the third and engaged thee to do the very thing he desired?" Then this man, confessing his weakness, cast himself at the saint's feet and began to bewail his fault with so much the more compunction and tears, as he was convinced that, although remote and absent as he was, he committed it in the presence of Father Benedict.

*Peter.* I see clearly the holy man was animated with the spirit of the prophet Eliseus, who was a witness of the actions of his absent disciple.

## CHAPTER XIV.

OF KING TOTILA'S ATTEMPT AT DECEPTION DETECTED BY SAINT BENEDICT.

YOU must, dear Peter, observe an attentive silence to hear things still greater and more remarkable than what I have just related. When Italy was under the Goths, their king, Totila, hearing the holy Abbot was endued with the spirit of prophecy, set out to go to his monastery, but while yet at a considerable distance therefrom, halted and sent to notify the saint that he would come and see



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him. Reply was made that he could come at any moment that pleased him; but as this prince loved to use artifice and to deceive, he resolved to make a trial whether the man of God had really the spirit of prophecy. To this end he gave his boots to an equerry, named Riggo, vested him in royal robes and commanded him to repair to the man of God as if he were the king himself. He also resolved that the three knights of his court most frequently near his person, namely: Vulteric, Ruderic and Blindin, should escort Riggo, and pretending to acknowledge him as their king, they should

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stand around him when in the presence of the man of God. Then he gave Riggo a guard and placed other persons as a retinue, that these marks of respect and the purple in which he was dressed might cause him to pass for the king himself. Riggo, thus arrayed in royal robes and escorted by so many who did him honor, entered the monastery and perceived the man of God sitting at a distance. The saint seeing him approach, waited until he was so near that he could hear his voice and then cried out: "Put off, my son, those robes you wear and which belong not to you!" At these words

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Riggo fell to the ground, affrighted and confounded for having presumed to make mockery of one so great and so illustrious. All his attendants fell prostrate likewise, and, when they rose, had not the hardihood to come near the servant of God, but returned to their king and, trembling, told him how readily the artifice was detected.



## CHAPTER XV.

OF SAINT BENEDICT'S PROPHECY TO TOTILA, AND CONCERNING HIM TO THE BISHOP OF CANUSA.

THEN Totila came himself to visit the man of God, and when from afar he beheld him sitting, not daring to approach nearer, he fell prostrate on the ground. Twice or thrice Benedict bade him rise, and seeing he remained still prostrate, the servant of Jesus Christ approached and raised him up. He reproached him with the evil deeds he com-

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mitted and very briefly indicated what was to befall him, saying: "You do much evil, and you have already done much; cease at length to perpetrate injustice. You will actually enter Rome and you will cross the sea; but after having reigned for nine years more you will die in the tenth." These words frightened the king; and, recommending himself to the prayers of the saint, he withdrew and was henceforth less cruel. Not long after he went to Rome, then passed over to Sicily, and in the tenth year of his reign lost his kingdom and life by decree of the Almighty. The bishop of the

church of Canusa used to visit the servant of God, and the saint loved him much for his merits and virtues. This prelate, conversing with him about the taking of Rome and the ruin to be inflicted on that city, said: "This prince will make himself master of Rome, reduce it to ashes, and then it shall be deserted and without inhabitants." But the man of God replied: "Rome shall not be destroyed by foreign nations, but beaten down by tempests, accompanied with lightning and thunder, shaken by earthquakes which shall destroy its splendor and beauty; and it shall have the same fate as

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a flower that fades and pines away on the stem." The secret of this prophecy is no longer hidden; it appears to us clearer than day, since we see walls shattered, houses overturned, churches demolished by the violence and fury of the winds, and so many other edifices, spent, as it were, with old age, fall of their own accord, presenting to our eyes only a melancholy heap of ruins. As to the rest, Honoratus, his disciple, who has told me these things, says not that he has learned them from the mouth of the saint, but only declared other religious have assured him that he said what we have just recounted.

## CHAPTER XVI.

OF A CLERIC, WHO, HAVING BEEN DELIVERED FROM SATAN, WAS AGAIN POSSESSED BY HIM.

AT that very time, a certain clerk of the church of Aquin was tormented by the devil, and the venerable Constance, bishop of that city, sent him to various shrines consecrated to martyrs to recover his health. But those holy martyrs did not vouchsafe to accord it, that his ailment might serve to make known the excellence of the grace with which



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heaven had favored Benedict. He was therefore conducted to the servant of God; and Benedict, having invoked Jesus Christ, immediately expelled from the body of the man the old enemy that possessed him. But having restored him to health, he addressed him thus: "Go, and from henceforth never eat meat, and be not so rash as to present thyself for holy Orders; for on the very day thou hast the presumption to receive them, thou shalt fall back into the power of the devil." The man returned, perfectly healed; and, as affliction lately experienced inspires fear, for some time he ob-

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served what the man of God had told him. But several years after, seeing his seniors were dead and his juniors enrolled among the clergy, he behaved as though length of time had effaced the words of the man of God from his mind and hesitated not to receive holy Orders. But at that same hour, the devil who had left him reëntered, and never ceased to torment him until he had, as it were, shaken the soul out of him.

*Peter.* This man of God, I perceive, also penetrated the secrets of the divinity, for he knew the man had been delivered up to the

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devil to the end that he should not have the presumption to take holy Orders.

*Gregory.* Why should he not have some knowledge of the secrets of the divinity, one who so punctually observed the divine laws; since, according to Saint Paul, "*He who adheres to the Lord is one spirit?*" (1 Cor., vi, 17.)

*Peter.* If he who adheres to the Lord is one spirit with Him, how must we understand what this excellent preacher has said in another place, when he asks: "*Who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been His counsellor?*" (Rom., xi, 34.) For it seems it would be

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doing violence to right reason to say that he who is become the same spirit with some one is nevertheless ignorant of his thoughts and designs.

*Gregory.* The saints, inasmuch as they are one spirit with God, are not unacquainted with His designs, as the same Apostle says: "*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.*" (1 Cor., ii, 11.) And this is why, to show that he knew the things of God, he adds: "*Now we have received not the spirit of this world but the spirit that is of God.*"

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(1 Cor., ii, 12.) He further says in the same epistle: "*The eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what things God hath prepared for them that love Him. But to us God hath revealed them by His spirit.*" (1 Cor., ii, 9.)

*Peter.* If then the things of God have been revealed to the same Apostle by the spirit of God, why in this same place where he asks, "Who hath known the mind of the Lord," does he first exclaim: "*O the depth of the riches, of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God. How incomprehensible are His judgments and how unsearchable His*

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*ways!*” (Rom., xi, 33.) But while I bring forward this passage of the Apostle, a difficulty which can be formed on this subject presents itself to my mind; for the prophet David, addressing the Lord, says: “*With my lips I have pronounced all the judgments of Thy mouth.*” (Ps. cxviii, 13.) Since then to know a thing is less than to explain it in words, why does Saint Paul say the judgments of God are incomprehensible, and nevertheless the prophet David assures us he has pronounced all His judgments?

*Gregory.* I have replied in a few words to the difficulty which arises

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from the apparent opposition of these passages, and have said the saints, inasmuch as they are united with God, are not unacquainted with His thoughts and designs. For all who follow and serve Him devoutly are united to Him by the grace of devotion; and nevertheless it can be said that they are not with Him, inasmuch as they are still pressed down under the weight of corruptible flesh. They know therefore the hidden judgments of God, inasmuch as they are united to God; but they know them not, inasmuch as they are separated from Him, and they truly testify that they cannot comprehend His

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judgments because they cannot entirely penetrate them. Such, however, as are attached and united to God in spirit, and who, in this attachment, are instructed either by reading the scriptures, or by secret revelations, know divine things, according to the instructions and lights they receive; and not only do they know them, but they also speak of them and make them known to others. Therefore they do not know the judgments which God discloses not, and they know those which He teaches by His word, and this is why the prophet David, after having said, "my lips have pronounced all the



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judgments" immediately adds, "of Thy mouth;" for as to those which Thou dost not explain by Thy word, Thou concealest them no doubt and they remain hidden. Thus the sentiment of the prophet is in harmony with that of the Apostle; for it is true that the judgments of God are incomprehensible, and yet those which it pleases Him to pronounce with His own mouth are afterwards pronounced by those of mortals; for they can be known by men after God has pronounced them, but no one can penetrate or discover them if He conceals and chooses not to reveal them.

*Peter.* This explication shows that it is not without reason I have found a difficulty in this subject; but I pray you to inform me what you still know about the virtues and miracles of this saint.



## CHAPTER XVII.

OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE MONASTERY OF MONTE CASSINO WHICH ST. BENEDICT FORETOLD.

**A** NOBLEMAN, Theoprobus by name, was converted by the counsel and persuasion of Father Benedict, and merited by his virtue to obtain a large share of the confidence of the saint, so that they were on terms of great intimacy. Entering one day the saint's cell, he found him weeping bitterly. He drew back a long while and said nothing; but seeing that he

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ceased not to weep, and that if he sent forth cries and lamentations, it was not because this usually happened to him in prayer, but because he was sorely afflicted, he enquired the cause of so profound a sorrow. The saint immediately replied: "This entire monastery and all I have prepared for my brethren have, by a just judgment of God, been given over to the infidels, and only with great difficulty have I obtained that the inmates shall not lose their lives." Theoprobos heard this prediction of the saint then, but now we witness its accomplishment, for we know that the monastery was de-

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stroyed by the Lombards. It is not very long since these barbarians entered it at night whilst the monks were asleep; they despoiled it of everything, but they could not lay their hands on a single one of the inmates, Almighty God having fulfilled what He promised to His faithful servant Benedict, namely: that if He delivered up to the Gentiles the goods of the monastery, He would preserve the lives of those who dwelt there. Wherein it seems that Saint Benedict was favored with a grace like to that of Saint Paul, who, when beholding the vessel on which he had embarked, about to be lost and every-

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thing thrown overboard, had the consolation to obtain from heaven that the passengers who accompanied him should be saved and not one of them lost in the shipwreck.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW SAINT BENEDICT KNEW BY REVELATION THE DISHONESTY OF A BOY WHO HAD PURLOINED AND SECRETED A BOTTLE OF WINE.

ON a certain occasion our well-beloved Exhilaratus, who, as you know, became a monk, was sent by his master to the monastery of the man of God to present him with two little wooden vessels, commonly called flasks, filled with wine; but he brought him only one and kept the other which he hid on the way. The saint, to whom

even things remote and done in his absence were not unknown, received the flask with thanks, and when the boy was about to leave, said to him: "Son, take care not to taste of that bottle which you have hidden, but stoop it a little and you shall see what is in it." Exhilaratus left covered with shame, and on his way back, desiring to make trial whether what was told him was true, stooped the flask and a snake issued therefrom. This horrible sight made an impression on his mind, and rendering him sensible of the sin he had been guilty of, moved him to detest it.



## CHAPTER XIX.

OF THE KNOWLEDGE THE SAINT HAD OF THE FAULT OF ONE OF HIS DISCIPLES WHO HAD CONCEALED SOME HANDKERCHIEFS GIVEN HIM AS A PRESENT.

NOT far from the monastery was a town, a great number of whose inhabitants Saint Benedict converted, inducing them to abandon the worship of idols and serve the living God. There were also nuns residing there, and the saint often sent some of his disciples to instruct and form them to

piety. On a certain day the monk who was sent to give the spiritual instructions yielded to their request to accept some handkerchiefs, which, for his own use, he hid in his bosom. On his return, the man of God reproached him with indignation and said: "How is it that iniquity has entered thy bosom?" The religious was quite surprised, and, not remembering what had taken place at the convent, knew not why the Abbot so bitterly rebuked him. "Was I not present," said the saint, "when you accepted handkerchiefs from the handmaids of God and placed them in your bosom?" At these

words the monk fell prostrate at the saint's feet, manifested regret for his evil conduct, and drawing forth the handkerchiefs from his bosom, cast them on the ground.



## CHAPTER XX.

OF A PROUD THOUGHT FORMED IN THE  
MIND OF A MONK, WHICH WAS DIS-  
COVERED BY THE MAN OF GOD.

ON a certain day, whilst the venerable father partook of his meal towards evening, a monk, son to one of the officers appointed to defend the interests of churches or towns, was holding a lamp near the table to light him. As the man of God was thus taking his refec- tion, the monk, standing with the lamp in his hand, was assailed by the spirit of pride and said within

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himself: "Who is this man in whose presence I here stand while he eats, to whom I hold a lamp, and upon whom I am waiting! And who am I, to be thus compelled to serve him?" At the same instant the man of God, turning round, severely rebuked him, saying: "Brother, make the sign of the cross on thy heart. What sayest thou within thee? Make the sign of the cross quickly." He immediately called other monks whom he ordered to take the lamp out of the hands of this brother, and bade the latter wait on him no more and retire at once to sleep. Afterwards, these monks having

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pressed him to disclose what had happened in his heart, he told them in detail how he permitted himself to be puffed up with the spirit of pride and what he was saying against the man of God within himself. Then it clearly appeared to each of them that nothing was hidden from the venerable Father Benedict, since he heard the interior words of a thought to which the voice had given no outward utterance.



## CHAPTER XXI.

OF THE TWO HUNDRED BUSHELS OF FLOUR THAT, IN A TIME OF FAMINE, WERE FOUND BEFORE THE MONASTERY OF THE MAN OF GOD.

AT another time the province of Campania (where Monte Cassino is situated) was afflicted with famine, and all the inhabitants found themselves reduced to a great scarcity of provisions. Consequently flour failed in Benedict's monastery. Most of the loaves had been consumed, and the monks had only five remaining for the

next repast. The venerable father seeing them sad and grieved, reproved them gently for their weakness and want of confidence in God, and at the same time consoled them, saying: "Why do you afflict yourselves because you are in want of bread? There is but little of it to-day, to-morrow you shall have it in abundance." They found in fact, the following day, before the gate of the monastery two hundred bushels of wheat in sacks; and, up to the present, no one has known by whose agency Almighty God sent them to the holy Abbot. The monks, seeing themselves relieved in so wonderful



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a manner, gave thanks to God, and learned thereby to have more confidence in His bounty, and to expect plenty even in the time of the greatest scarcity.

*Peter.* But tell me, I entreat thee, are we to believe this servant of God had always the spirit of prophecy, or was only replenished with it from time to time?

*Gregory.* Dear Peter, the spirit of prophecy does not constantly enlighten the prophets; for, whereas, according to Scripture, "*the Spirit breatheth WHERE He will,*" (John, iii, 8,) it must be held as certain that He breathes *when* He wills. Whence it comes that the prophet

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Nathan, consulted by David as to whether he should build a temple, at first favored the undertaking; but afterwards, by God's command, dissuaded him therefrom. Whence also it is that Eliseus, seeing the Sunamitess weeping, and knowing not the cause of her sorrow, said to his servant who wished to remove her: "*Let her alone, for her soul is in anguish, and the Lord hath hid it from me and hath not told me the cause of her affliction.*" (4 Kings, iv, 27.) And it is by a dispensation replete with wisdom and bounty that God disposed thus; for, at one time giving the spirit of prophecy, and withholding it at

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another, He raises the prophets to a high degree of honor and pre-eminence, and holds and preserves them in humility; so that receiving this spirit (which discloses to them things future or remote) they acknowledge what they are by God's grace, and, receiving it not, behold what they are of themselves.

*Peter.* What you say is founded on a very clear and solid reason which unveils to me its truth, but I must entreat you to unfold what you further know regarding the venerable Father Benedict.

## CHAPTER XXII.

OF A VISION WHEREBY THE SAINT POINTS  
OUT THE PROPER PLAN FOR ERECTING  
A MONASTERY.

A VIRTUOUS man requested him, at another time, to give him some of his disciples to build a monastery on his own grounds, which were near Terracina. The saint granted his request and sent him some religious, appointing one as Abbot and another as his aid to discharge the functions of prior. These monks being ready to set out, he said: "Proceed, and on

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such a day I will join you and show you in what place you shall erect the oratory, the refectory, the guest house and other necessary buildings." Having received the blessing, they set out on their journey. Arrived at their destination, they awaited the day on which the saint had promised to visit them, and prepared everything they thought necessary to receive those who might accompany a father whom they held in such reverence. But the night immediately preceding the day appointed a vision came to the servant of God whom he had made Abbot, and to the prior, and clearly

pointed out to them the site on which they should erect each of the buildings. When they arose from sleep they told each other what they saw whilst reposing. However, they mistrusted the vision, and as they were not entirely persuaded that it was true, they continued to wait until the man of God would arrive as he had promised. The saint not having come at the expected time, they returned home in sadness and said to him: "Father, we awaited the promised arrival and expected you would mark out the plan of each building, but you have not taken the trouble to come." He replied:

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“Why do you speak thus, brethren, did I not go as I promised?” The religious enquiring at what time he came, he replied: “Have I not manifested myself to you while asleep and given all necessary directions? Go back and build the monastery according to the plan shown you in the vision.” Hearing these things, they were amazed and returned to the grounds on which the monastery was to be built, and laid the foundations according to the design revealed in the vision.

*Peter.* I would willingly learn how it was possible for him to go to instruct those who were asleep,

and how he could make himself so well understood that they recognized it was he who was speaking.

*Gregory.* Why do you ask, Peter, an explanation of how the thing could be done, as if the difficulty you find therein set you doubting? It is quite certain that the spirit is more nimble and more capable of transporting itself from one place to another than the body; and we have the testimony of Scripture that the prophet Habacuc was caught up in Judea with the dinner he had prepared for his reapers and in a moment transported to Chaldea, where he gave food to the prophet (Daniel, who was in the



lion's den,) and then, all at once, found himself back again in Judea. If, therefore, Habacuc, being so far away from Daniel, was in an instant with him corporally and gave him to eat, is it surprising if Father Benedict obtained from God the power to visit his sleeping brethren and give them the necessary instructions; so that as the prophet went in body to give corporal food to another prophet who had need of it, in like manner this holy Abbot went in spirit to instruct his religious in a matter of great import to a spiritual life.

*Peter.* Your discourse has been, as it were, a skilful hand which has

removed from my mind a doubt beginning to form there; but I much desire to learn what force the words of this holy man had while he spoke (not as one enlightened with the spirit of prophecy, but) in his ordinary state of mind.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

OF THE TWO NUNS WHOM THE SAINT  
BEHELD AFTER THEIR DEATH.

GREGORY. Dear Peter, the plain, ordinary words of the venerable Benedict were well worthy of attention, and hardly did he utter any devoid of weight and energy; for his heart being attached to God, his words (flowing from the abundance of the heart) partook of their origin and proceeded not in vain from his mouth. If he said anything, not intending to decide, but merely by

way of reprimand, his words had as much force and weight as if uttered, not with doubt and reserve, but in a tone at once decisive and peremptory. Not far from the monastery there were two nuns living in their own private house, for whom a man who feared God used to procure the necessaries of life. But as there are some persons in whom nobility of birth produces feelings of vanity which hinder them from acquiring nobility of soul, (which consists in virtue,) for they despise their own selves so much the less in this world as their birth has raised them above others, these nuns had not yet entirely

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subdued their tongue and curbed it with the bridle of the holy profession whose habit they wore, but frequently provoked by indiscreet words this just man who attended to their needs. Having already suffered much from their taunts, he went to find the man of God and gave him to understand how greatly his feelings were outraged by their language. Whereupon the holy Abbot sent to warn, on his part, those nuns, in these words: "Bridle your tongue, for if you do not, I will excommunicate you." This was not pronouncing sentence against them, but only a threat. The nuns did not improve

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thereby, and making no change in their usual conduct, died not long after and were buried in the church. After this, when Mass was celebrating, and the deacon made, according to custom, the following announcement: "Whoever goes not to communion, let him retire," their nurse, who was in the habit of presenting on their part an offering to the Lord, saw them issue from the tomb and leave the church. Having often seen them retire thus at the deacon's voice, and unable to remain in the church, she remembered the warning of the man of God, addressed to them during life; for he told them he

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deprived them of communion if they did not reform their manners and bridle their tongue. Then some persons came to the servant of God and told him with signs of great sorrow this extraordinary and wonderful affair. The saint gave them with his own hand an offering and said: "Go and cause this offering to be presented to the Lord in behalf of those women, and they shall no longer be excommunicated." This offering having been thus made for them and immolated in the Sacrifice, when the deacon came to cry out: "Whoever go not to communion, let them retire," they were no longer seen, as before,

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to rise out of the tomb; whereby it clearly appears that since they did not retire any more with those who partook not of the Holy Mysteries, they had received from God, through the intercession of his servant, the grace of the communion of saints.

*Peter.* What you tell me appears marvellous; and, though I am persuaded this man was most holy and most venerable, I am surprised that being yet clad in corruptible flesh, he could release souls which seemed no longer amenable but to the invisible bar of God's justice.

*Gregory.* Did not Saint Peter still dwell in a mortal body when



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the Lord said to him : “ *Whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose upon earth shall be loosed also in heaven?* ” (Matt., xvi, 19.) But those bind and loose in his place, who by purity of faith and conduct, fulfil worthily the duty of governing souls. But, in order that a man sprung from the earth may have such great power, the Creator of heaven and earth has come down from heaven to earth. And to the end that this man clothed in flesh may have power to judge even spirits, God, who was made flesh for the salvation of men, has given him this power and

authority; for our weakness has been raised above itself by this admirable mystery, wherein the power of God is abridged, as it were, and lowered beneath itself.

*Peter.* The saint's words are in harmony with his miracles, and these two things give a lofty idea of his merits.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

OF A YOUNG MONK WHOSE BODY THE  
EARTH CAST UP AFTER IT HAD BEEN  
BURIED.

GREGORY. A young monk,  
G who was yet but a child, had  
an immoderate love for his parents;  
and one day, without having re-  
ceived the saint's blessing, passed  
the cloister gate and went to see  
them, but died the moment he  
reached their dwelling. The day  
after he was buried, his body was  
found outside of the grave, and his  
friends replaced it carefully; but

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the following day they were surprised when they saw the grave had cast his body up again: it lay on the surface as if they neglected to bury him. Then they hastened to Father Benedict and, falling down, implored him with tears to forgive his little novice. The man of God gave them, with his own hand, the body of Jesus Christ and said: "Go in peace, and, with great respect, lay the body of our Lord on the child's breast and bury him so." They obeyed the saint's orders, and the earth, having received the body of the novice, retained it and cast it up no more. You see, dear Peter, how great

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were the merits of this man in the eyes of Jesus Christ, since the earth itself could not endure the body of one who had forfeited the good will of Saint Benedict.

*Peter.* I see it clearly and am amazed thereat.



## CHAPTER XXV.

OF A MONK WHO, WHEN LEAVING THE  
MONASTERY, MET A DRAGON ON THE  
WAY.

**A**MONG his monks was one who, instigated by levity of mind, would no longer live in the monastery. The man of God rebuked him incessantly and gave him good advice, but he was too fickle to profit by it. He could not make up his mind to stay in the community, and besought the saint with much importunity to grant him leave to withdraw. One day

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the venerable father, tired of his continual and disagreeable entreaties, commanded him to leave. He had no sooner left the monastery, than he encountered a dragon which, advancing with open jaws, seemed ready to devour him. Panting for breath and trembling with fear, he shouted aloud: "Help! help! see the dragon going to devour me." The monks ran to him and saw no dragon, but finding him terribly excited and quaking with affright, they brought him back to the monastery. He immediately promised never again to pass the limits of the cloister, and henceforth faithfully kept his promise,

being convinced that the holy man, by his prayers, gave him to see the dragon which he had been following unawares.





## CHAPTER XXVI.

### OF A CHILD CURED OF LEPROSY.

**B**UT I must not omit what I have learned from the illustrious Antonius. He told me formerly his son had in his employ a boy who became a leper, and whose disease so violently increased that his hair fell off, the skin swelled and could neither retain within nor conceal the corrupted blood; his father having sent him to the man of God, he was healed immediately and restored to perfect health.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### OF MONEY MIRACULOUSLY OBTAINED TO PAY A CREDITOR.

I WILL not pass over in silence what his disciple Peregrinus used to relate. On a certain day a very upright man, having no money to acquit himself of a debt he owed, was sorely pressed for payment. He saw he had no other resource than to speak to the man of God and reveal to him his necessity. He came therefore to the monastery, and, having found the saint, told him he was dunned by

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a creditor who demanded twelve gold crowns. The venerable father replied he had not twelve gold crowns; however, to console him, he gently said: "Go, but return in two days, for I have not at present wherewith to assist you." The saint spent the two days in prayer, as he was wont, and the man who was pressed for payment having returned the third day, thirteen gold crowns were found at the moment on a corn-bin which was in the monastery. Then the man of God ordered them to be brought, and, placing them in the hands of this much afflicted person, directed him to give twelve to his creditor

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and keep the thirteenth for his own special needs. But I must return to what I have heard from some of his disciples whom I have mentioned at the beginning of this book. A man had the ill-luck to be exposed to the envy of another who became his enemy; and the passion of the latter carried him so far that he mingled poison, all unsuspected, with the drink of the former. The poison was too weak to deprive him of life, but it disfigured him by covering his body with various spots, so that like a leper he was checkered all over. To restore his former health, he was conducted to the man of God

and obtained a complete cure; for the moment the saint touched him all these spots disappeared and his skin became perfectly clean.



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

OF A BOTTLE THROWN UPON STONES AND  
NOT BROKEN.

WHEN Campania was afflicted with a great famine, the man of God distributed all the provisions of the monastery to the poor. There remained almost nothing in the cellar but a little oil in a small glass bottle. There came, however, a deacon, named Agapitus, and earnestly asked for a little oil. The saint, who had resolved to give all he had on earth to receive it again in heaven, ordered the little

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that remained to be given him. The religious who was then procurator heard the order, but delayed to execute it; and the saint enquiring shortly after if he had done what was told him, the procurator replied he had not, for if he gave the oil none would remain for his brethren. Then the saint, greatly displeased, commanded other disciples to go and take the vessel containing the oil and throw it out at the window, so that no one might be able to say disobedience had preserved anything to the monastery; and this order was executed. There was beneath the window a very steep

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precipice, at the bottom of which were only pointed fragments of rocks; and nevertheless the glass vessel, falling on these rough stones, remained as safe and sound as if it had not been cast forth, and as if it could not be broken nor the oil spilled. When this was told the saint, he gave orders to go and pick up the vessel and give it as it was to the person who had requested the oil. Then, having assembled the brethren, he reproved the disobedient monk for his pride and want of faith.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

### OF THE BARREL MIRACULOUSLY FILLED WITH OIL.

THE saint, having thus reprimanded the procurator, betook himself to prayer with the brethren. In the very place in which he was praying with his disciples there was a barrel in which there was no more oil, but nevertheless had the lid on. Benedict persevering in prayer, the lid began to rise, forced upwards by the abundance of oil in the barrel, and finally was displaced alto-

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gether. The oil overflowed the brim, inundating the pavement. The servant of God, seeing it spreading, ended prayer, and the oil ceased to increase and overflow on the pavement. Then addressing a second time this brother so diffident and disobedient, he reminded him of his fault, and dwelt at some length on the need of having in future more faith and confidence in God, and also more obedience and submission to his superiors. This second reprimand proved useful and salutary to him; he blushed for his guilty conduct, seeing the venerable father showed forth by miracles that virtue and power of God which

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he had depicted and extolled in his discourse; and that neither he himself, nor any one else, had any reason to doubt of His promises, after He had, at the same moment, given them a barrel of oil in the place of a glass bottle, which was almost empty.



## CHAPTER XXX.

OF A MONK WHOM THE SAINT DELIVERED FROM SATAN.

THE saint going one day to St. John's Church, situated on the summit of a mountain, perceived Satan in the guise of a farrier, carrying a horn and fetters, and asked him: "Whither art thou going?" He replied: "I go to the brothers to give them a potion." The venerable Father Benedict continued his journey, recited his prayers, and returned in all haste to the monastery. Meanwhile the evil spirit met one of the senior

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religious who was fetching water, and, entering his body, cast him on the ground and maltreated him with extreme violence. The man of God, returning from the chapel after prayer, saw the monk cruelly tormented; and, to relieve him, only slapped him on the cheek. By this salutary blow he forced Satan to desist immediately, and henceforth the evil spirit durst not trouble him any more.

*Peter.* I much desire to know whether he always worked these great miracles, obtaining them from God by his prayers, or performed them sometimes by the sole motion of his will.

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*Gregory.* Whoever are united to God by a spirit entirely devoted to His service, usually work miracles in both these ways when necessity requires it; so that they sometimes perform them by obtaining them from God in virtue of prayer, and at other times by their own power. For since Saint John has said, our Lord gave to as many as received Him, power to be made the sons of God, is it surprising that those who are His children, by the power which He has given them, should perform, by the same, things extraordinary and wonderful? But that they can work miracles both these ways is proved by the example of

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Saint Peter, who, by his prayers, raised the widow Tabitha to life, and who, accusing Ananias and Saphira of falsehood, punished them with death by a reproof; for the Scripture does not state that he said any prayer before this man and woman lost their lives, only he severely rebuked them for the fault they had committed. It is then clear from this twofold mode of action on the part of the Apostle, that the saints sometimes work miracles by means of prayer, and at other times by the power and authority which God gives them; since Saint Peter deprived these two persons of life by upbraiding

them with their fault, and restored it to the pious widow by having recourse to prayer. I now proceed to relate two miracles of Saint Benedict, faithful servant of God, by the recital of which it will clearly appear that he effected the one by the power he had received from God, and the other through the means of prayer.





## CHAPTER XXXI.

OF A PEASANT, WHO, WHEN BOUND WITH  
CORDS, WAS DELIVERED BY A LOOK OF  
THE MAN OF GOD.

**I**N the time of Totila, King of the Goths, a countryman, of his, named Galla, who was engaged in the Arian heresy, conceived a most violent aversion for the pious people who served God in the Catholic Church. He persecuted them with extreme cruelty, and any ecclesiastic or monk who had the misfortune to meet him, could not escape his hands or return

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with his life. One day, burning with insatiable avarice and breathing robbery and pillage, he seized a peasant and began to torment him cruelly and lacerate his body with various modes of punishment (in hope of extorting a ransom). The poor peasant, overwhelmed with pain, declared he had given all his effects to Benedict, servant of God, to keep, hoping that the barbarian who assaulted him would believe this avowal and for awhile intermit his violence, and so regaining a little strength he might at least delay death for a few hours. Galla, in fact, did not continue to torment him, but having pinioned

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him with strong cords, compelled him to walk before his horse and point out that Benedict who had his goods in safe-keeping. The peasant, his hands thus tied, led him to the monastery and found the saint before the gate, seated and engaged in reading. And, as Galla, who made him walk before him, gave, all the time, proofs of his wrath, the peasant said at last: "There is Father Benedict whom I mentioned." Galla, all inflamed, and whose furious zeal for evil had turned his brain, fastened his eyes on the saint; and, believing he should, as he was wont, obtain all he wished by inspiring terror, said

to him haughtily and in a loud voice: "Get up, get up, and restore the effects of this man which you have taken." At these words the man of God raised his eyes off the book, fixing them on Galla and on the peasant, whose arms were pinned all the while. When he had looked on this poor man for a moment, the cords which bound him were unloosed so quickly by virtue of an unseen and wondrous power, that no human skill could untie them so easily and so soon. Thus the peasant, who came bound as a captive, found himself immediately set free. This marvellous effect of the saint's power terrified

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the proud and cruel Goth. He fell to the ground, all trembling, and bowed his haughty head at the feet of Benedict, commending himself to his prayers. For all this the saint did not rise to his feet, nor cease from reading, but calling some brethren, ordered them to conduct Galla into the monastery that he might receive the comfort usually administered to guests. He was then brought back to the saint who admonished him to be more reasonable, and henceforth to abandon his cruelty. Galla returning home crestfallen and humiliated, no more dared require anything from the peasant

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whom the man of God had, without touching him, and simply by a look freed from his bonds.

You see then, dear Peter, the proof of what I have said, that those who are united to God, and faithfully serve Him, sometimes perform miracles by virtue of the power and authority he confers. For the saint who, remaining seated, repressed the pride and insolence of this Goth, so furious and so terrible; and who, by a look alone, untied the knots and removed the cords wherewith the barbarian had bound the arms of an unoffending person, clearly showed by the ready and quick

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execution of a thing so wonderful, that he did so by means of a power which he had received from heaven. It shall now be seen, from the fact I am going to relate, how great a miracle the saint obtained of God through the merits of his prayers.



## CHAPTER XXXII.

OF A DEAD PERSON RESTORED TO LIFE.

ON one occasion, the saint having gone to the fields to work with his brethren, a peasant, whose son had been carried off by death, came to the monastery, holding in his arms the body of his son and manifesting extreme grief at his loss. Enquiring for Father Benedict, and having been told he was in the field with the brethren, he laid down the body of his son before the gate of the monastery, and, altogether discomposed and overcome with grief,



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ran with great speed to find the venerable father. Just at that moment the man of God was coming home from work in the company of his monks. As soon as the bereaved peasant saw him, he began to cry out: "Restore my son, restore my son!" At these words Benedict stopped short and said: "Have I taken away your son?" "He is dead," replied the peasant, "come and restore him to life." The servant of God, listening to this demand, was greatly troubled and said: "Retire, brethren; it is not for us, but for the holy Apostles, to work miracles. Why do you lay upon us burdens which we

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are unable to bear?" But the man, overcome by the violence of grief, persisted in his demand, and swore he would not leave him until he restored his son. "Where is your son?" asked the saint. "His body lies near the monastery gate," replied the peasant. The man of God, having arrived there with his brethren, went on his knees, stooped down over the body of the child, and, raising himself again, extended his hands towards heaven and said: "O Lord, look not on my sins, but on this man's faith, who implores that his son be restored to life. Replace in this little body the soul Thou hast

thence withdrawn!" His prayer was hardly ended when the boy's whole body, as the soul reëntered it, trembled; a thing noticed by all present, for they clearly saw the boy started in an extraordinary and wonderful manner. Then the saint took him by the hand and, presenting him to his father, restored him full of life and health.

It is evident, dear Peter, that on this occasion he had no power of his own to work the miracle, since, prostrating himself, he prayed to God to accord him this favor.

*Peter.* Your remarks on the subject of miracles ought to be considered true, for the examples you

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have just brought forward are clear and substantial proof. But I beg you to inform me if the saints can do all they desire, and whether they obtain from God everything they ask.



## CHAPTER XXXIII.

OF THE MIRACLE OF SAINT SCHOLASTICA, SAINT BENEDICT'S SISTER.

SHALL there ever be in this world a man of more eminent virtue and transcendent merits than Saint Paul? And still, dear Peter, having prayed the Lord three times to deliver him from the sting of the flesh which annoyed him, he was unable to obtain what he desired. And for this reason I must recount what one day befell Father Benedict, to show you that on this occasion he wished

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to do something which he was unable to accomplish.

He had a sister named Scholastica, who was, from her infancy, consecrated to the service of God, and was accustomed to come to see him once a year to Monte Cassino. The man of God went down some distance on the monastery grounds, which extended towards the foot of the mountain, to receive her. Thus having come one day according to custom, her venerable brother, accompanied by his disciples, went to meet her. They passed the entire day in singing the praises of God and conferring on spiritual matters, and partook

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together of an evening refection, as day was fast declining. While they sat at table and dwelt on heavenly bliss, the holy virgin at length perceived the moment for parting was nigh, and addressed the saint as follows: "Brother, I implore thee leave me not this night, let us prolong our discourse till morning and speak of eternal joys." The saint replied: "What sayest thou, sister? I cannot remain out of the monastery." The weather was so fine and clear that no speck of cloud appeared in the firmament; but the holy nun hearing her brother's refusal, folded her hands, and placing them thus on

the table, inclined her head thereon, and in this posture had recourse to God by fervent prayer. The moment she raised her head lightnings flashed, frightful thunder rolled, and so deluging a rain poured down, that it was impossible for the venerable Benedict and his monks to quit their place of shelter. For the spouse of Christ, inclining thus her head on her hands, had shed a flood of tears which burdened the air with clouds and drew down the rain, which did not delay to follow. Her prayers and those torrents of water were so entirely simultaneous, that at the same instant in which she



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raised her head from the table, the thunder began to roll and the rain to fall. Then the man of God, concluding he could not return to the monastery in the midst of thunder and lightnings, and those floods which streamed down from the heavens, was greatly pained thereat, and complained to his sister, saying: "May Almighty God forgive you, sister; what have you done?" To which she replied: "I have besought you, but you would not hear me; I have had recourse to my Lord, and he has heard me; go forth now if you can, and, forsaking me, return to your monastery." The saint, unable to

leave a house wherein he was sheltered from the storm, was forced to remain against his will in a place wherein he refused to stay willingly. Thus these two holy persons kept vigil the entire night, and indulged their ardor for divine things by the pleasure they took in manifesting to each other the taste and affection which they felt therefor. I have said that on this occasion the venerable Father desired what he could not obtain; for if the object he had in view be considered, there can be no doubt that he wished the weather to continue fine and favorable to his return; but contrary to his wish, he found

himself retarded by a storm which God had miraculously raised at the prayer of a woman. There is no reason to be surprised that a woman, who had been long desiring to behold her brother, should have such mighty power; for, according to the words of Saint John, "*God is love,*" and so it was by His just judgment that victory in the contest of piety remained with the woman; for in this instance she displayed superior love.

*Peter.* I exceedingly relish what you say.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

OF HIS SISTER'S DEATH, WHOSE SOUL  
HE SAW ASCEND TO HEAVEN.

ON the following day this venerable mother returned to her convent, and the man of God to his monastery. Three days afterwards, being in his cell, he lifted up his eyes on high and saw the soul of his sister, just disengaged from the body, ascend to heaven in the form of a dove. This vision revealed the glory of his sister and filled his breast with inexpressible joy; he thanked God therefor, reciting

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hymns and canticles, and communicated the news of this happy death to his disciples. He immediately sent them to the place of her abode to convey her body to the monastery and bury it in the tomb which he had prepared for himself. Thus it came to pass that two whose souls had been only one in God, were not divided by death, for the same tomb received their bodies.



## CHAPTER XXXV.

OF A REVELATION WHICH SHOWED THE SAINT THE WHOLE WORLD COLLECTED UNDER A SINGLE RAY OF THE SUN, AND THE GLORY OF ST. GERMANUS, BISHOP OF CAPUA.

WHAT we are going to say here happened at another time. Servandus, Deacon, and abbot of the monastery built in Campania by Liberius, a Roman Patrician, used to visit the venerable Benedict. His reason for visiting the saint so frequently was, that being himself well skilled in the subject

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of grace, he sought means of discoursing with him, in order that mutually imparting to each other the sentiments and opinions which they entertained regarding eternal life, they might taste, at least by their sighs, the agreeable nutriment of their heavenly home, with which they could not as yet satiate themselves by full and perfect enjoyment. Once as they conferred together it grew late and they retired for repose. Benedict ascended to the highest floor of the tower, from which a staircase led down to the cell in which Deacon Servandus slept. Fronting the tower was a large building in which the disci-

ples of both abbots were sleeping. While the brethren still reposed, Benedict, man of God, watched, and anticipating the night office, stood near a window and addressed his prayers to God. While thus engaged, about the middle of a dark night, he perceived a celestial light diffusing itself in a moment throughout the air, and so dispelling the darkness, that it formed a day brighter and more beautiful than the day itself. This vision was followed by a wonderful sight; for, as he afterwards declared, the whole world appeared before his eyes, collected, as it were, under a single ray of the sun. The vener-



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able father, intent on the transcendent brightness, saw the soul of Germanus, bishop of Capua, carried to heaven by angels, in the midst of a globe of fire. He wished some one to witness so great a miracle, and to this effect, called Deacon Servandus twice or thrice with a loud voice. The deacon, frightened by the call of one so peerless, hastened up and looked out upon the skies, but he enjoyed only a small glimpse of the admirable brightness; and as he was taken by surprise, and beside himself with what he saw, the servant of God told him all that had happened. He immediately directed a very vir-

tuous man named Theoprobus, who was then in the town of Cassino, to send a messenger to Capua that very night, to enquire about Bishop Germanus and report him the news. This order was obeyed. The messenger learned that the Most Reverend Bishop Germanus died, and on a most strict enquiry, discovered that the holy prelate rendered up his soul at the very moment in which the man of God saw him ascend to heaven.

*Peter.* What you have just related is something wonderful, and to which one cannot listen without astonishment. But when I reflect on what you have said, that the

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world appeared before his eyes, contracted and brought under a single ray of the sun, I confess, having never observed anything similar, I cannot, without difficulty, conceive how it is possible for one man to view, in an instant, the whole world.

*Gregory.* Hold what I say as certain; all creatures are little in the eyes of a soul beholding the Creator. For if she sees even a faint ray of increated light, all created beings appear to her extremely small and diminished; for the light of this inward vision opens and expands the capacity and intellective faculty of the

mind; so that the mind in consequence dilating itself to contemplate the grandeur of the Divinity, rises above the world. In this contemplation the soul is also raised above its own self; for being ravished and carried away by the allurements of the divine light, she becomes superior to herself with an increase of penetration and discernment, which gives her the power of surpassing herself in the knowledge of the truth. And in this state, perceiving things inferior to herself, she discovers all their littleness: a thing which she cannot do when she considers them according to the vileness of her natural intel-

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ligence. Thus, certain it is, that this man of God, who perceived the globe of fire and the angels returning to heaven, could not possibly see those things except in the light of the Divinity. Is there any reason then to wonder that a man, who, by the elevation to which this light of the spirit raised him, was outside of the world, had been able to view it collected before his eyes? But when we say the world appeared insignificant in his eyes, we do not mean that heaven and earth lost their vastness, or were reduced to lesser compass, but that the spirit of the saint, who had the vision, was enlarged, and

being transported in the Divinity, could, without difficulty, behold whatever is beneath God. Thus, while the sensible and exterior light diffused in the air appeared to his corporal eyes, his soul was illumined with an interior light, which, lifting his mind to higher things, caused him to see how insignificant are things beneath (when compared with the First Being).

*Peter.* I believe it has been an advantage to me not to have understood at first what you related, since the difficulty I felt in conceiving it has induced you to vouchsafe me so ample an illus-

tration; but since you have so happily explained these things, I request you to resume the thread of your narration.



## CHAPTER XXXVI.

OF THE RULE WHICH HE WROTE FOR HIS  
MONKS.

I WOULD willingly delay, dear Peter, to tell you still other things about the life of the venerable father, but I purposely omit them, for I feel impelled to relate the deeds of other illustrious persons. I do not, however, wish you should not know, that amid so many miracles which have rendered him far-famed, he has also been distinguished for his ability in teaching the doctrine of salvation.



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For he has written a rule for monks which is superlative in wisdom and discretion, and, as regards style, of much perspicuity. So that if any one wishes to have an exact knowledge of his life and manners, he has only to consult the rule, and he shall find therein all the maxims, the whole mode of discipline of this skilful master; for, being a holy man, it was impossible for him to teach what he did not himself practice.



## CHAPTER XXXVII.

OF THE REVELATION WHICH HE HAD OF  
HIS DEATH, AND HOW HE INFORMED  
HIS DISCIPLES THEREOF.

THE same year that he was to pass out of this life he foretold the day of his death to some of his disciples who resided with him, as also to others living at a considerable distance, directing those near him to disclose nothing of what he told them, and pointing out to those absent the sign whereby they might know his soul was separated from the body. Six days

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before his death he ordered his tomb to be opened, and was immediately seized with a burning fever, which tormented him with extreme violence. The five following days his disease increased more and more, and on the sixth he bade his disciples carry him to the oratory, and prepared for death, receiving the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Then standing erect, and supporting his weak and languishing body on the arms of his disciples, he raised his hands to heaven, and, whilst in that attitude of prayer, gave up his soul to God. The same day his glory was revealed to two religious, of whom one lived in

the monastery, the other at a considerable distance, and both knew it by one and the same vision. For they beheld in the direction of the orient, a path ornamented with tapestry and lighted with innumerable flambeaux, leading directly from his cell to heaven. There appeared at the same time a venerable man, clothed in light, who enquired of them for whom that path had been prepared, and as they avowed they did not know, he said: "That is the path by which Benedict, the well-beloved of God, ascended to heaven." It was thus the saint's disciples who were absent were apprised of his death, at

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the same moment as those who were with him, as he had foretold them. He was interred in the chapel of Saint John, the Baptist, which he erected after having overturned the altar of Apollo. In the grotto the saint shines refulgent by his miracles even to this day, when the faith of pious persons requests those extraordinary graces.



## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### OF AN INSANE WOMAN CURED IN THE SAINT'S GROTTTO.

THE miracle which I am about to relate happened not long since. An insane woman, who entirely lost her mind, was running night and day over mountains and valleys, woods and plains, never stopping, only where extreme fatigue forced her to rest. One day, wandering here and there, she came to Saint Benedict's grotto and, entering without knowing what she

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was doing, passed the night therein. On the morning of the following day she found herself as sound in mind as if she had never lost her senses, and, during the remainder of her life, was quite sensible and preserved the free use of reason.

*Peter.* What shall we say of what commonly happens: that the holy martyrs whose assistance people go to implore in their chapels do not as often obtain graces where their bodies lie, as in others where only some of their relics are preserved; in a word, perform greater miracles where their bodies do not repose?

*Gregory.* There is no doubt, dear Peter, but that the holy martyrs can work miracles in the places where they are interred, and do really display their merits by numberless kinds of wonders in favor of those who invoke them with a heart pure and well disposed. But because the weak-minded might doubt whether they are as present and as capable of hearing them in the places where their bodies repose not, it is necessary that they should make their power felt by greater prodigies in those places where persons less enlightened might doubt of their presence. But those who are united to God by a lively faith and a firm



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confidence have all the more merit in His sight, since, knowing well the bodies of the saints are not in the places where they invoke them, they nevertheless feel confident they can hear them. It is for the same reason that our Divine Saviour, who is Truth itself, to increase their faith, said to His disciples: "*For if I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you.*" For, as it is certain, that the Holy Ghost, who is the Comforter, proceeds always from the Father and the Son, why does the Son say that He shall go in order that the Holy Ghost may come, since this Divine Spirit never leaves the

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Father? But because the disciples, seeing our Lord clothed in human flesh which He had assumed, ardently desired to see Him always with corporal eyes, He very justly said to them: "*If I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you;*" as if He plainly said: "If I withdraw not my body from your eyes, I will not show you what the love of the Spirit is; and if you cease not to behold me with bodily eyes, you shall never learn to love me with a spiritual love."

*Peter.* What you say pleases me extremely.

*Gregory.* Let us break off our conversation for a little, that silence

may restore the strength of which we shall have need if we undertake to recount you the miracles which other saints have performed.

U. I. O. G. D.

