

MARCH XXI.

ST. BENEDICT, ABBOT,

PATRIARCH OF THE WESTERN MONKS.

From St. Gregory, (Dial. l. 2. c. 1.) who assures us that he received his account of this saint from four abbots, the saint's disciples; namely, Constantine, his successor at Monte Cassino, Simplicius, third abbot of that house, Valentinian, the first abbot of the monastery of Lateran, and Honoratus, who succeeded St. Benedict at Subiaco. See the remarks of Mabillon, *Annal. Ben.* l. 1. p. 3. and l. 2. p. 38. and *Act. Sanct. Bened.* t. 1. p. 80. Also Dom. Mege, *Vie de Saint Benoît*, avec une *Histoire Abrégée de son Ordre*, in 4to. An. 1690. Hæften's *Disquisitions*, and abbot Steingelt's abridgment of the same, and Ziegelbauer and Legipont, *Historia Literaria Ord. S. Benedicti*, An. 1754. t. 1. p. 3. and principally t. 3. p. 2.

A.D. 543.

SAINT BENEDICT, or BENNET, was a native of Norcia, formerly an episcopal see in Umbria, and was descended from a family of note, and born about the year 480. The name of his father was Eutropius, and that of his grandfather, Justinian. When he was fit for the higher studies, he was sent by his parents to Rome, and there placed in the public schools. He, who till that time knew not what vice was, and trembled at the shadow of sin, was not a little shocked at the licentiousness which he observed in the conduct of some of the Roman youth, with whom he was obliged to converse; and he had no sooner come into the world, but he resolved to bid an eternal farewell to it, and not to be entangled in its snares. He therefore left the city privately, and made the best of his way towards the deserts. His nurse, Cyrilla, who loved him tenderly, followed him as far as Afilum, thirty miles from Rome, where he found means to get rid of her, and pursued his journey alone to the desert mountain of Sublacum,* near forty miles from Rome. It is a barren, hideous, chain of rocks, with a river and lake in the valley. Near this place the saint met a monk of a neighbouring monastery, called Romanus, who gave him the monastic habit, with suitable instructions, and conducted him to a deep narrow cave in the midst of these mountains, almost inaccessible to men. In this cavern, now called the Holy Grotto, the young hermit chose

* Called by the Italians, who frequently soften *l* into *i*, Subiaco.

his abode: and Romanus, who kept his secret, brought him hither, from time to time, bread and the like slender provisions, which he retrenched from his own meals, and let them down to the holy recluse with a line, hanging a bell to the cord to give him notice. Bennet seems to have been about fourteen or fifteen years old when he came to Sublacum; St. Gregory says, he was yet a child. He lived three years in this manner known only to Romanus. But God was pleased to manifest his servant to men, that he might shine forth as a light to many. In 497, a certain pious priest in that country, whilst he was preparing a dinner for himself on Easter-Sunday, heard a voice which said: "You are preparing for yourself a banquet, whilst my servant Bennet, at Sublacum, is distressed with hunger." The priest immediately set out in quest of the hermit, and with much difficulty found him out. Bennet was surprised to see a man come to him; but before he would enter into conversation with him, he desired they might pray together. They then discoursed for some time on God and heavenly things. At length the priest invited the saint to eat, saying, it was Easter-day, on which it is not reasonable to fast; though St. Bennet answered him, that he knew not that it was the day of so great a solemnity, nor is it to be wondered at, that one so young should not be acquainted with the day of a festival, which was not then observed by all on the same day, or that he should not understand the Lunar Cycle, which at that time was known by very few. After their repast the priest returned home. Soon after certain shepherds discovered the saint near his cave, but at first took him for a wild beast; for he was clad with the skins of beasts, and they imagined no human creature could live among those rocks. When they found him to be a servant of God, they respected him exceedingly, and many of them were moved by his heavenly discourses to embrace with fervour a course of perfection. From that time he began to be known, and many visited him, and brought him such sustenance as he would accept: in requital for which he nourished their souls with spiritual instructions. Though he lived sequestered from the world, he was not yet secure from the assaults of the tempter. Wherever we fly the devil still pursues us, and we carry a domestic enemy within our own breasts. St. Gregory relates that whilst St. Bennet was employed in divine contemplation, the fiend endeavoured to withdraw his

mind from heavenly objects, by appearing in the shape of a little black bird; but that, upon his making the sign of the cross, the phantom vanished. After this, by the artifices of this restless enemy, the remembrance of a woman whom the saint had formerly seen at Rome, occurred to his mind, and so strongly affected his imagination, that he was tempted to leave his desert. But blushing at so base a suggestion of the enemy, he threw himself upon some briars and nettles which grew in the place where he was, and rolled himself a long time in them till his body was covered with blood. The wounds of his body stifled all inordinate inclinations, and their smart extinguished the flame of concupiscence. This complete victory seemed to have perfectly subdued that enemy; for he found himself no more molested with its stings.

The fame of his sanctity being spread abroad, it occasioned several to forsake the world, and imitate his penitential manner of life. Some time after the monks of Vicovara,* on the death of their abbot, pitched upon him to succeed him. He was very unwilling to take upon himself that charge, which he declined in the spirit of sincere humility, the beloved virtue which he had practised from his infancy, and which was the pleasure of his heart, and is the delight of a God humbled even to the cross, for the love of us. The saint soon found by experience that their manners did not square with his just idea of a monastic state. Certain sons of Belial among them carried their aversion so far as to mingle poison with his wine: but when, according to his custom, before he drank of it he made the sign of the cross over the glass, it broke as if a stone had fallen upon it. "God forgive you, brethren," said the saint, with his usual meekness and tranquillity of soul, "you now see I was not mistaken when I told you that your manners and mine would not agree." He therefore returned to Sublacum; which desert he soon peopled with monks, for whom he built twelve monasteries, placing in each twelve monks with a superior.† In one of these twelve monasteries there lived a monk,

* Vicovara, anciently Varronis Vicus, a village between Subiaco and Tivoli.

† These twelve monasteries were situated in the same neighbourhood, in the province Valeria. Moderns disagree in their names and description, according to the account of Dom. Mege, which appears most accurate, the first was called Columbaria, now St. Clement's, and stood within sixty paces

who, out of sloth, neglected and loathed the holy exercise of mental prayer, insomuch that after the psalmody or divine office was finished, he every day left the church to go to work, whilst his brethren were employed in that holy exercise; for by this private prayer in the church, after the divine office, St. Gregory means pious meditation, as Dom. Mege demonstrates. This slothful monk began to correct his fault upon the charitable admonition of Pompeian, his superior; but, after three days, relapsed into his former sloth. Pompeian acquainted Saint Benedict, who said, "I will go and correct him myself." Such indeed was the danger and enormity of this fault, as to require the most effectual and speedy remedy. For it is only by assiduous prayer, that the soul is enriched with the abundance of the heavenly water of divine graces, which produces in her the plentiful fruit of all virtues. If we consider the example of all the saints, we shall see that prayer was the principal means by which the Holy Ghost sanctified their souls, and that they advanced in perfection in proportion to their progress in the holy spirit of prayer. If this be neglected, the soul becomes spiritually barren, as a garden loses all its fruitfulness, and all its beauty, if the pump raise not up a continual supply of water, the principle of both. St. Benedict, deploring the misfortune and blindness of this monk, hastened to his monastery, and coming to him at the end of the divine office, saw a little

from the saint's cave, called the Holy Grotto; the second was named of SS. Cosmas and Damian, now St. Scholastica's; the third, St. Michael's; the fourth, of St. Donatus, bishop and martyr; the fifth, St. Mary's, now St. Laurence's; the sixth, St. John Baptist's, situated on the highest part of the rock, but from a fountain which St. Bennet produced there by his prayers, and which still subsists; it is at present called St. John dell' Acqua; the seventh, St. Jerom's; the eighth, Vita Eterna; the ninth, St. Victorian or Victorin's called from a martyr of that name, who is patron of the province of Valeria; the tenth, at the neighbouring village Trebare; the eleventh, at St. Angelus's; the twelfth, at a fountain near the ancient castle, called Roca de Bore. These monasteries have been all united in that of St. Scholastica, which remains in a very flourishing condition, and is regarded as the mother-house of the whole Order, being certainly more ancient than that of Mount Cassino. It is a member of the Congregation of St. Justina, and though it is usually given in commendam, by a peculiar distinction, it is governed by a regular abbot chosen by the General Chapter. Of the rest of these twelve monasteries, only some cells or ruins remain. Besides the hundred and forty-four monks which were distributed in these twelve monasteries, St. Gregory tells us, that the holy patriarch retained a small number with himself, by which it appears that he continued to live ordinarily in a distinct little monastery or hermitage about his grotto, though he always superintended and governed all these houses.

black boy leading him by the sleeve out of the church. After two days' prayer, St. Maurus saw the same; but Pompeian could not see this vision, by which was represented that the devil studies to withdraw men from prayer, in order that, being disarmed and defenceless, they may easily be made a prey. On the third day, St. Benedict finding the monk still absent from church in the time of prayer, struck him with a wand, and by that correction the sinner was freed from the temptation. Dom. German Millet, (1) tells us, from the tradition and archives of the monastery of St. Scholastica, that this happened in St. Jerom's. In the monastery of St. John, a fountain sprung up at the prayers of the saint; this, and two other monasteries, which were built on the summit of the mountain, being before much distressed for want of water. In that of St. Clement, situate on the bank of a lake, a Goth, who was a monk, let fall the head of a sickle into the water as he was cutting down thistles and weeds in order to make a garden; but St. Maur, who with St. Placidus lived in that house, holding the wooden handle in the water, the iron of its own accord swam, and joined it again, as St. Gregory relates. St. Benedict's reputation drew the most illustrious personages from Rome and other remote parts to see him. Many, who came clad in purple, sparkling with gold and precious stones, charmed with the admirable sanctity of the servant of God, prostrated themselves at his feet to beg his blessing and prayers, and some, imitating the sacrifice of Abraham, placed their sons under his conduct in their most tender age, that they might be formed to perfect virtue from their childhood. Among others, two rich and most illustrious senators, Eutychius, or rather Equitius, and Tertullus, committed to his care their two sons, Maurus, then twelve years old, and Placidus, also a child, in 522.* The devil, envying so much good, stirred up his wicked instruments to disturb the tranquillity of the servant of God. Florentius, a priest

(1) See Dom. Mege, p. 84.

* It has been related in the life of St. Maurus, how he walked on the water to save the life of Placidus, then a child, who, going to the lake to fetch water, had fallen in; for in monasteries no distinction was shown to noblemen or their children, nor were they exempted from their share in manual labour, or other severities of the Rule. Such exemptions and privileges granted to many on pretence of health, first opened the door to a relaxation of monastic discipline. Placidus said, that when he was drawn by Maurus

in the neighbouring country, though unworthy to bear that sacred character, moved by a secret jealousy, persecuted the saint, and aspersed his reputation with grievous slanders. Bennet, being a true disciple of Christ, knew no revenge but that of meekness and silence: and not to inflame the envy of his adversary, left Sublacum, and repaired to Mount Cassino. He was not got far on his journey, when he heard that Florentius was killed by the fall of a gallery in which he was. The saint was much afflicted at his sudden and unhappy death, and enjoined Maurus a penance for calling it a deliverance from persecution.

Cassino is a small town, now in the kingdom of Naples, built on the brow of a very high mountain, on the top of which stood an old temple of Apollo, surrounded with a grove in which certain idolators still continued to offer their abominable sacrifices. The man of God having, by his preaching and miracles, converted many of them to the faith, broke the idol to pieces, overthrew the altar, demolished the temple and cut down the grove. Upon the ruins of which temple and altar he erected two oratories or chapels; one bore the name of St. John the Baptist, the other of St. Martin. This was the origin of the celebrated abbey of Mount Cassino, the foundation of which the saint laid in 529, the forty-eighth year of his age, the third of the emperor Justinian: Felix IV., being pope, Athalaric king of the Goths in Italy. The patrician, Tertullus, came about that time to pay a visit to the saint, and to see his son Placidus; and made over to this monastery several lands which he possessed in that neighbourhood and also a considerable estate in Sicily. St. Bennet met on Mount Cassino, one Martin, a venerable old hermit, who, to confine himself to a more austere solitude, had chained himself to the ground in his cell, with a long iron chain. The holy abbot, fearing this singularity might be a mark of affectation, said to him: "if you are a servant of Jesus Christ, let the chain of his love, not one of iron, hold you

out of the water, he saw over his head the melotes of the abbot, and seemed to be saved by it, whence the miracle was by the disciples ascribed to St. Benedict. Dom. Hæften thinks by the melotes is meant a cowl, to which that name is given by Paul the deacon, and the Roman Order or Ceremonial. But most understand a habit made of skins of goats, such as the Eastern monks wore, in imitation of the ancient prophets, as Cassian describes. (Instit. l. i. c. 8.)

fixed in your resolution." Martin gave proof of his humility by his obedience, and immediately laid aside his chain. Saint Bennet governed also a monastery of nuns, situate near Mount Cassino, as is mentioned by St. Gregory: he founded an abbey of men at Terracina, and sent St. Placidus into Sicily to establish another in that island. Though ignorant of secular learning, he was eminently replenished with the spirit of God, and an experimental science of spiritual things: on which account he is said by St. Gregory the Great to have been "learnedly ignorant and wisely unlettered."* For the alphabet of this great man is infinitely more desirable than all the empty science of the world, as St. Arsenius said of St. Antony. From certain very ancient pictures of St. Benedict and old inscriptions, Mabillon proves this saint to have been in holy orders, and a deacon.(1) Several moderns say he was a priest; but, as Muratori observes without grounds. By the account which St. Gregory has given us of his life, it appears that he preached sometimes in neighbouring places, and that a boundless charity opening his hand, he distributed amongst the needy all that he had on earth, to lay up his whole treasure in heaven, St. Bennet, possessing perfectly the science of the saints, and being enabled by the Holy Ghost to be the guide of innumerable souls in the most sublime paths of Christian perfection, compiled a monastic rule, which, for wisdom and discretion, St. Gregory the Great preferred to all other rules; and which was afterwards adopted, for some time, by all the monks of the West. It is principally founded on silence, solitude, prayer, humility, and obedience.†

(1) Annal. Bened. t. 5. p. 172. ad. an. 543. See also Muratori. Script. Ital. t. 4. p. 217

* *Scienter nesciens, et sapienter indoctus.*

† By it the abbot is charged with the entire government of the monastery. Seven hours a day are allotted the monks for manual labour, and two for pious reading, besides meditation from matins till break of day. But manual labour has been exchanged in most places for sacred studies and spiritual functions. The rule commands perpetual abstinence from flesh-meat, not only of four-footed animals, but also of fowls, which at that time were only served at the tables of princes as most exquisite dainties, as Mabillon shows from the testimony of St. Gregory of Tours. This law of abstinence is restored in the reformed congregation of St. Maur, and others. The hemina of wine allowed by St. Bennet per day, in countries where wine and water are only drank, has been the subject of many dissertations, this measure having not been the same at all times, nor in all countries. The Roman hemina, which was half a sextarius, contained ten ounces, as Montfaucon demonstrates,

St. Bennet calls his Order a school in which men learn how to serve God: and his life was to his disciples a perfect model for their imitation, and a transcript of his rule. Being chosen by God, like another Moses, to conduct faithful souls into the true promised land, the kingdom of heaven, he was enriched with eminent supernatural gifts, even those of miracles and prophecy. He seemed, like another Eliseus, endued by God with an extraordinary power, commanding all nature; and like the ancient prophets, foreseeing future events. He often raised the sinking courage of his monks, and baffled the various artifices of the devil with the sign of the cross, rendered the heaviest stone light, in building his monastery by a short prayer, and, in presence of a multitude of people, raised to life a novice who had been crushed by the fall of a wall at Mount Cassino. He foretold,

(Antiqu. expl. t. 3. l. 4. c. 7. p. 149. 152.) and as Mabillon allows. (Præf. in Sæc. 4.) Lancelot endeavours to show, in a dissertation on this subject, that St. Bennet is to be understood of this Roman hemina. Menard takes it to have been only seven ounces and a half. Mabillon (Pr. in Sæc. 4. p. cxv.) and Martenne (in c. 40. Règ.) think the holy founder speaks not of the ordinary or Roman hemina, and understand him of the Grecian, which contained a pound and a half, or eighteen ounces. Calmet looks upon Lancelot's opinion as most probable. He shows from the clear tradition of Benedictin writers and monuments, that St. Benedict's hemina contained three glasses or draughts. See Calmet (in c. 40. Règ. t. 2. p. 62.) But St. Benedict allows and commends a total abstinence from wine. The portion of bread allowed by this holy patriarch to each monk, was a pound and a half, or eighteen ounces a day, as it is explained by the famous council held at Aix-la-Chapelle, in the reign of Charlemagne.

The holy rule of St. Benedict, which the great Cosmus of Medicis, and other wise legislators read frequently, in order to learn the maxims of perfect government, has been explained by a great number of learned and pious commentators, of whom Calmet gives a list. (t. 1. p. 1.) The principal amongst the moderns are Hæften, prior of Affligem, in twelve books of monastic disquisitions, &c. Steingelt, abbot of Anhusen, gave a judicious abridgment of this work. Dom. Menard has written upon this rule in his Comments on the Concord of Rules of St. Benedict of Anian. Dom. Mege's Commentaires sur la Règle de St. Benoît, in 4to. printed at Paris, in 1687, have been much blamed by his brethren for laxity. Dom. Martenne published with more applause his Commentarius in Regulam S. Benedicti, in 4to., in 1690. Son édition de la Règle est la plus exacte qu'on nous a donné; et son Commentaire également judicieux et savant. Il ne parle pas de celui de Dom. Mege qui avoit parut trois ans avant le sien; parceque ses sentiments relâchés sur la méthode de pratiquer ou imposer des humiliations et sur plusieurs autres points ont scandalisés ses confrères, de sorte qu'en plusieurs monastères réformés de cet ordre on ne le met pas entre les mains des jeunes religieux. Voyez le Cerf, Bibl. des Ecr. de la Congr. de St. Maur, p. 348. Hist. Literaria Ord. St. Bened. t. 3. p. 21. Dom. Calmet printed in 1734, in two volumes, in 4to. Commentaire Littéral Historique et Moral sur la Règle de St. Benoît, a work which, both for edification and erudition, is far superior to all the former, and is the master-piece of this laborious writer, though not

with many tears, that this monastery should be profaned and destroyed; which happened forty years after, when the Lombards demolished it about the year 580. He added, that he had scarcely been able to obtain of God that the inhabitants should be saved. It was strictly forbidden by the rule of St. Benedict, for any monk to eat out of his monastery, unless he was at such a distance that he could not return home that day, and this rule, says St. Gregory, was inviolably observed. Indeed nothing more dangerously engages monks in the commerce of the world; nothing more enervates in them the discipline of abstinence and mortification, than for them to eat and drink with seculars abroad. St. Gregory tells us, that St. Bennet knew by revelation the fault of one of his monks who had accepted of an invitation to

entirely exempt from little slips of memory, as when St. Cuthbert is called in it the founder of the monastery of Lindisfarne. (p. 18. t. 1.) The chief modern ascetical treatise on this subject is, *La Règle de St. Benoît, traduite et expliquée par M. de Rancé abbé de la Trappe*, 2 vols. 4to. 1690, an excellent work for those who are bound to study, and imbibe the spirit of this holy rule. It is reduced into meditations; which, as Calmet was informed by Mabillon, was done by a Benedictin nun. We have also *Meditations on the Rule of St. Benedict*, compiled by Dom. Morelle, author of many other works of piety and devotion. We have also very devout reflections on the prayers used in the religious profession of this order, under the following title: *Sentimens de Piété sur la Profession religieuse, par un religieux Bénédictin de la Congrégation de St. Maur*. Dom. Berthelet of the congregation of St. Vannes, proves abstinence from flesh to have been anciently an essential duty of the monastic state, by an express book, entitled, *Traité Historique et Moral de l'Abstinence de la Viande*, 1731.

* When the Lombards destroyed this famous abbey, in 580, St. Bennet, the abbot, escaped with all his monks to Rome, carrying with him only a copy of the Rule, written by St. Benedict himself, some of the habits which he and his sister St. Scholastica had wore, and the weight of the bread and measure of the wine which were the daily allowance for every monk. Pope Pelagius II. lodged these fathers near the Lateran church, where they built a monastery. In the pontificate of Gregory II. about the year 720, they were conducted back by abbot Petronax to Mount Cassino. This abbey was again ruined by the Saracens in 884: also by the Normans in 1046, and by the Emperor Frederic II. in 1239. But was as often rebuilt. It is at this day very stately, and the abbot exercises an episcopal jurisdiction over the town of San Germano, three little miles distant, and over twenty-one other parishes. The regular abbot of St. Scholastica at Subiaco, is temporal and spiritual lord of twenty-five villages. The Benedictins reckon in their Order, comprising all its branches and filiations, thirty-seven thousand houses. As to the number of emperors, kings, queens, princes, and princesses, who embraced this Order, and that of saints, popes, and writers of note, which it has given the church, see F. Helyot, Dom. Mege, Calmet, and especially F. Ziegelbayer, *Hist. Liter. Ord. S. Bened.* 4 vol. folio. Aug. Vindel. An. 1754.

The monastic Order settled by St. Athanasius at Milan and Triers, during his banishment into the West; by St. Eusebius of Vercelli, in his diocess

take some refreshment when he was abroad on business.(1) A messenger who brought the saint a present of two bottles of wine, and had hid one of them, was put in mind by him to beware drinking of the other, in which he afterwards found a serpent. One of the monks, after preaching to the nuns, had accepted of some handkerchiefs from them, which he hid in his bosom; but the saint, upon his return, reproved him, for his

(1) St. Greg. Dial. l. 2. c. 2. Dom. Mege, p. 180.

and by St. Hilary and St. Martin in Gaul, was founded upon the plan of the Oriental monasteries; being brought by those holy prelates from Egypt and Syria. The same is to be said of the first monasteries founded in Great Britain and Ireland. After the coming of St. Columban from Ireland into France, his Rule continued long most in use, and was adopted by the greater part of the monasteries that flourished in that kingdom. But it was customary in those ages, for founders of great monasteries, frequently to choose out of different Rules such religious practices and regulations, and to add such others as they judged most expedient: and the Benedictin Rule was sometimes blended with that of St. Columban or others. In the reigns of Charlemagne and Lewis the Debonnaire, for the sake of uniformity, it was enacted by the council of Aix-la-Chapelle in 802, and several other decrees, that the Rule of St. Benedict should alone be followed in all the monasteries in the dominions of those princes. F. Keyner, a most learned English Benedictin, in his *Apostolatus Benedictinorum* in Anglia, has, with profound erudition, produced all the monuments and authorities by which it can be made to appear that St. Gregory the Great established the Rule of St. Benedict in his monastery of St. Andrew, at Rome, and was settled by St. Austin and the other monks who were sent by St. Gregory to convert the English in all the monasteries which they founded in this island. These proofs were abridged by Mabillon, Natalis Alexander, and others, who have judged that they amount to demonstration. Some, however, still maintain that the monastic Rule, brought hither by St. Austin, was a compilation from several different Rules: that St. Bennet Biscop, and soon after, St. Wilfred introduced several new regulations borrowed from the Rule of St. Benedict; that St. Dunstan established it in England more perfectly, still retaining several of the ancient constitutions of the English monasteries, and that it was not entirely adopted in England before Lanfranc's time. This opinion is warmly abetted by Dr. Lay, in his additions to Dugdale's *Antiquities of Warwickshire*, and Tanner's *Pref. to Notitia Monastica*, in folio.

The Order of St. Benedict has branched out since the year 900, into several independent congregations, and the Orders of Camaldoli, Vallis Umbrosa, Fontevault, the Gilbertins, Silvestrins, Cistercians, and some others, are no more than reformations of the same, with certain particular additional constitutions.

Among the Reformations or distinct Congregations of Benedictins, the first is that of Cluni, so called from the great monastery of that name, in the diocese of Macon, founded by William the Pious, duke of Aquitaine, about the year 910. St. Berno, the first abbot, his successor St. Odo, afterwards St. Hugh, St. Odilo, St. Mayeul, Peter the Venerable, and other excellent abbots exceedingly raised the reputation of this reform, and propagated the same. A second Reformation was established in this Congregation in 1621, by the Grand Prior de Veni, resembling those of St. Vanne and St. Maur. Those

secret sin against the rule of holy poverty. A novice, standing before him, was tempted with thoughts of pride on account of his birth: the saint discovered what passed in his soul and bid him make the sign of the cross on his breast.

When Belisarius, the emperor's general, was recalled to Constantinople, Totila, the Arian king of the Goths, invaded and plundered Italy. Having heard wonders of the sanctity of St. Bennet, and of his predictions and miracles, he resolved to

monks who would not adopt it in their houses, are called Ancient monks of Cluni. The Congregation of Cava was so called, from the great monastery of that name, in the province of Salerno, founded in 980, under the observance of Cluni: it was the head of a Congregation of twenty-nine other abbeys, and ninety-one conventual priories; but a bishopric being erected in the town of Cava, by Boniface IX. in 1394, and the abbot's revenue and temporal jurisdiction being united to it by Leo X. in 1514, the monastery of the Blessed Trinity of Cava was much diminished, but is still governed by a regular abbot. In 1485, it was united with all its dependencies to the Congregation of St. Justina and Mount Cassino. The church of St. Justina at Padua, was founded by the Consul Opilius, in the fifth century, and the great monastery of Benedictin monks was built there in the ninth. The Reformation which was established in this house by Lewis Barbus, a patrician of Venice, in 1409, was soon adopted by a great number of monasteries in Italy; but when in 1504 the abbey of Mount Cassino joined this Congregation, it took the name of this mother-house. The Congregation of Savigni, founded by St. Vitalis, a disciple of B. Robert of Arbrissei, in the forest of Savigni, in Normandy, in 1112, was united to the Cistercians in 1153. The Congregation of Tiron, founded by B. Bernard of Abbeville, another disciple of B. Robert of Arbrissel, in 1109, in the forest of Tiron, in Le Perche. It passed into the Congregation of St. Maur, 1629. These of Savigni and Tiron had formerly several houses in England. The Congregation of Bursfield in Germany, was established by a Reformation in 1461: that of Molck, vulgarly Melck, in Austria, in the diocese of Passaw, in 1418: that of Hirsauge, in the diocese of Spire, was instituted by St. William, abbot of S. Aurel, in 1080. The history of this abbey was written by Trithemius. After the change of religion it was secularized, and, by the treaty of Westphalia, ceded to the duke of Wirtemberg. The independent great Benedictin abbeys in Flanders, form a Congregation subject only to the Pope, but the abbots hold assemblies to judge appeals, in which the abbot of St. Vaast of Arras is president. The Congregation of Monte-Virgine, in Italy, was instituted by St. William, in 1119. That of St. Benedict's of Valladolid, in Spain, dates its establishment in 1390. In England, archbishop Lanfranc united the Benedictin monasteries in one Congregation, which began from that time to hold regular general chapters, and for some time bore his name. This union was made stricter by many new regulations in 1335, under the name of the Black Monks. It is one of the most illustrious of all the Orders, or bodies of religious men, that have ever adorned the Church, and in spite of the most grievous persecutions still subsists. The Congregation of Benedictin nuns of Mount Calvary, owes its original to a Reformation, according to the primitive austerity of this Order, introduced first in the nunnery at Poitiers, in 1614, by the abbess Antoinette of Orleans, with the assistance of the famous F. Joseph, the Capuchin. It has two houses at Paris, and eighteen others in several parts of France. See Helyot, t. 5 and 6. Calmet, Comment. sur la Règle de St. Benoît, t. 2. p. 525. Hermant, Schoonbeck, &c.

try whether he was really that wonderful man which he was reported to be. Therefore, as he marched through Campania, in 542, he sent the man of God word, that he would pay him a visit. But instead of going in person he dressed one of his courtiers, named Riggo, in his royal purple robes, and sent him to the monastery, attended by the three principal lords of his court, and a numerous train of pages. St. Bennet, who was then sitting, saw him coming to his cell, and cried out to him at some distance: "Put off, my son, those robes which you wear, and which belong not to you." The mock king, being struck with a panic for having attempted to impose upon the man of God, fell prostrate at his feet, together with all his attendants. The saint, coming up, raised him with his hand; and the officer returning to his master, related trembling what had befallen him. The king then went himself, but had no sooner come into the presence of the holy abbot, but he threw himself on the ground and continued prostrate till the saint, going to him, obliged him to rise. The holy man severely reproved him for the outrages he had committed, and said: "You do a great deal of mischief, and I foresee you will do more. You will take Rome: you will cross the sea, and will reign nine years longer: but death will overtake you in the tenth, when you shall be arraigned before a just God to give an account of your conduct." All which came to pass as St. Benedict had foretold him. Totila was seized with fear, and recommended himself to his prayers. From that day the tyrant became more humane; and when he took Naples, shortly after, treated the captives with greater lenity than could be expected from an enemy and a barbarian. (1) When the bishop of Canusa afterwards said to the saint, that Totila would leave Rome a heap of stones, and that it would be no longer inhabited, he answered: "No: but it shall be beaten with storms and earthquakes, and shall be like a tree which withers by the decay of its root." Which prediction St. Gregory observes to have been accomplished.

The death of this great saint seems to have happened soon after that of his sister St. Scholastica, and in the year after his interview with Totila. He foretold it to his disciples, and caused his grave to be opened six days before. When this was done he fell ill of a fever, and on the sixth day would be carried into the

(1) Procop. l. 3. de Bello Gothico. Baronius, &c.

chapel, where he received the body and blood of our Lord,* and having given his last instructions to his sorrowful disciples, standing, and leaning on one of them, with his hands lifted up, he calmly expired, in prayer, on Saturday, the 21st of March, probably in the year 543, and of his age the sixty-third; having spent fourteen years at Mount Cassino. The greater part of his relics remains still in that abbey; though some of his bones were brought into France, about the close of the seventh century, and deposited in the famous abbey of Fleury, which, on that account, has long borne the name of St. Bennet's on the Loire. † It was founded in the reign of Clovis II. about the year 640, and belongs at present to the congregation of St. Maur.

St. Gregory, in two words, expresses the characteristic virtue of this glorious patriarch of the monastic Order, when he says, that, returning from Vicovara to Sublaco, he dwelt alone with himself; (1) which words comprise a great and rare perfection, in which consists the essence of holy retirement. A soul dwells not in true solitude, unless this be interior as well as exterior, and unless she cultivate no acquaintance but with God and herself, admitting no other company. Many dwell in monaste-

(1) *Habitavit secum.*

* *Exitum suum Dominici corporis et sanguinis perceptione communivit.* St. Greg. Dial. b. 2. c. 37.

† Some have related that Aigulph, a monk of Fleury, and certain citizens from Mans, going to Mount Cassino in 653, when that monastery lay in ruins, brought thence the remains of St. Benedict and St. Scholastica, and placed those of the former at Fleury, and those of the latter at Mans. The author of this relation is either Adrevald or rather Adalbert, a monk of Fleury, whom some imagined contemporary with Aigulph; but he certainly lived at least two hundred years later, as he himself declares, and his account is in many capital circumstances inconsistent with those of the life of Aigulph, and with the authentic and certain history of that age, as is demonstrated by F. Stilling the Bollandist, in the life of St. Aigulph, (t. 1. Sept. p. 744.) and by others. It is printed in the *Bibliotheca Floriacensis*, (or of Fleury,) t. 1. p. 1. and more correctly in Mabillon's *Acta Ben.* t. 2. p. 337, and the Bollandists, 21 Martij, p. 300. Soon after this relation was compiled by Adalbert, we find it quoted by Adrevald, a monk of the same house, in his history of several miracles wrought by the relics of this holy patriarch. (See Dom. Clemencez, *Hist. Liter.* t. 5. p. 516.) This Adrevald wrote also the life of St. Aigulph, who, passing from Fleury to Lerins, and being made abbot of that house, established there an austere Reformation of the Order: but by the contrivance of certain rebellious monks joined in a conspiracy with the count of Uzez, and some other powerful men, was seized by violence, and carried to the isle Caprasia, (now called Capraia,) situated between Corsica and the coast of Tuscany, where he was murdered with three companions, about the year 676, on the 3rd day of September, on which he is honoured as a martyr at Lerins. The relics of these martyrs were honourably conveyed

ries, or alone, without possessing the secret of living with themselves. Though they are removed from the conversation of the world, their minds still rove abroad wandering from the consideration of God and themselves, and dissipated amidst a thousand exterior objects which their imagination presents to them, and which they suffer to captivate their hearts, and miserably entangle their will with vain attachments and foolish desires. Interior solitude requires the silence of the interior faculties of the soul, no less than of the tongue and exterior senses: without this, the inclosure of walls is a very weak fence. In this interior solitude, the soul collects all her faculties within herself, employs all her thoughts on herself and on God, and all her strength and affections in aspiring after him. Thus, St. Benedict dwelt with himself, being always busied in the presence of his Creator, in bemoaning the spiritual miseries of his soul and past sins, in examining into the disorders of his affections, in watching over his senses, and the motions of his heart, and in a constant attention to the perfection of his state, and the contemplation of divine things. This last occupied his soul in the sweet exercises of divine love and praise; but the first mentioned exercises, or the consideration of himself and of his own nothingness and miseries, laid the foundation by improving in him continually the

thither soon after their death. F. Vincent Barrali, in his *History of Lerins*, affirms that they still remain there; but this can be only true of part, for the body of St. Aigulph was translated to the Benedictin priory at Provins, in the diocese of Sens, and is to this day honoured there, as Mabillon (*Sæc. 2. Ben. p. 666 and 742.*) and Stilling (t. 1. Sept.) demonstrate, from the constant tradition of that monastery, and the authority of Peter Cellensis and several other irrefragable vouchers.

That the greater part at least of the relics of St. Benedict and St. Scholastica still remain at Mount Cassino, is demonstrated by Angelus de Nuce, in his dissertation on this subject, by F. Stilling, in his comments on the life of St. Aigulph, t. 1. Sept. by Pope Benedict XIV. *De Servor. Dei. Beatif. and Canoniz. l. 4. part 2. c. 24. n. 53. t. 5. p. 245.* and Macchiarelli, the monk of Camaldoli. Soon after Mount Cassino was restored, Pope Zachary visited that monastery, and devoutly venerated the relics of St. Benedict and St. Scholastica in 746, as he testifies in his Bull. When Pope Alexander II. consecrated the new church of that abbey in 1071, these sacred bones were inspected, and found all to remain there, as we learn from his Bull, and by Leo of Ostia, and Peter the deacon. The same is affirmed in the acts of two visitations made of them in 1545 and 1659. Nevertheless, Angelus de Nuce (who relates in his *Chronicle of Mount Cassino*, that, in 1659, he saw these relics, with all the monks of that house, in the visitation then made) and Stilling allow that some of the bones of this saint were conveyed into France, not by St. Aigulph, but soon after his time; and this is expressly affirmed by Paul the deacon, in his *History of the Lombards*, l. 6. c. 2.

most profound spirit of humility and compunction. The twelve degrees of humility, which he lays down in his Rule,(1) are commended by St. Thomas Aquinas.(2) The first is a deep compunction of heart, and holy fear of God and his judgments, with a constant attention to walk in the divine presence, sunk under the weight of this confusion and fear. 2. The perfect renunciation of our own will. 3. Ready obedience. 4. Patience under all sufferings and injuries. 5. The manifestation of our thoughts and designs to our superior or director. 6. To be content, and to rejoice, in all humiliations; to be pleased with mean employments, poor clothes, &c. to love simplicity and poverty, (which he will have among monks, to be extended even to the ornaments of the altar,) and to judge ourselves unworthy, and bad servants in every thing that is enjoined us. 7. Sincerely to esteem ourselves baser and more unworthy than every one, even the greatest sinners.* 8. To avoid all love of singularity in words or actions. 9. To love and practice silence. 10. To avoid dissolute mirth and loud laughter. 11. Never to speak with a loud voice, and to be modest in our words. 12. To be humble in all our exterior actions, by keeping our eyes humbly cast down with the publican,(3) and the penitent Manasses.(4) St. Benedict adds, that divine love is the sublime recompense of sincere humility, and promises, upon the warrant of the divine word, that God will raise that soul to perfect charity, which, faithfully walking in these twelve degrees, shall have happily learned true humility. Elsewhere he calls obedience with delay the first degree of humility,(5) but means the first

(1) S. Bened. Reg. c. 7.

(2) S. Thos. 2. 2. qu. 161. a. 6.

(3) Luke xviii. 18.

(4) Orat. ejus inter Apocryph.

(5) St. Bened. Rég. c. 6. p. 210.

* No one can, without presumption, pride, and sin, prefer himself before the worst of sinners, first, because the judgments of God are always secret and unknown to us. (See St. Aug. de Virginit. St. Thos. 2. 2. qu. 161. ad. 1. Cassian, St. Bern. &c.) Secondly, the greatest sinners, had they received the graces with which we have been favoured, would not have been so ungrateful; and if we had been in their circumstances, into what precipices should not we have fallen? Thirdly, instead of looking upon notorious sinners, we ought to turn our eyes towards those who serve God with fervour, full of confusion to see how far so many thousands are superior to us in every virtue. Thus we must practise the lesson laid down by St. Paul, never to measure ourselves with any one so as to prefer ourselves to another; but to look upon all others as superior to us, and less ungrateful and base than ourselves. Our own wretchedness and sinfulness we are acquainted with, but charity inclines us to judge the best of others.

among the exterior degrees; for he places before it interior compunction of soul, and the renunciation of our own will.

ST. SERAPION,

CALLED the Sindonite, from a single garment of coarse linen which he always wore. He was a native of Egypt. Exceeding great was the austerity of his penitential life. Though he travelled into several countries, he always lived in the same poverty, mortification, and recollection. In a certain town, commiserating the spiritual blindness of an idolater, who was also a comedian, he sold himself to him for twenty pieces of money. His only sustenance in this servitude was bread and water. He acquitted himself at the same time of every duty belonging to his condition with the utmost diligence and fidelity, joining with his labour assiduous prayer and meditation. Having converted his master and the whole family to the faith, and induced him to quit the stage, he was made free by him, but could not be prevailed upon to keep for his own use, or even to distribute to the poor, the twenty pieces of coin he had received as the price of his liberty. Soon after this he sold himself a second time, to relieve a distressed widow. Having spent some time with his new master, in recompense of signal spiritual services, besides his liberty, he also received a cloak, a tunic, or under-garment, and a book of the gospels. He had scarcely gone out of doors, when, meeting a poor man, he bestowed on him his cloak; and shortly after to another starving with cold, he gave his tunic; and was thus reduced again to his single linen garment. Being asked by a stranger who it was that had stripped him and left him in that naked condition, showing his book of the gospels, he said: "This it is that hath stripped me." Not long after, he sold the book itself for the relief of a person in extreme distress. Being met by an old acquaintance, and asked what was become of it, he said: "Could you believe it? this gospel seemed continually to cry to me: Go, sell all thou hast, and give to the poor. Wherefore I have also sold it, and given the price to the indigent members of Christ." Having nothing now left but his own person, he disposed of that again on several other occasions, where the corporal or spiritual necessities of his neighbour called for relief: once to a certain Manichee at Lacedæmon, whom he served for two years, and