JOHN OF SALERNO

The Life of Saint Odo

Vita S. Odonis

SABBATISMUS

John of Salerno (fl. c. 940)
Vita S. Odonis · The Life of Saint Odo

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THE AUTHOR'S PROLOGUE

1

To his lords and brothers in Christ of Salerno, Brother John, servant of Christ Jesus.

The book which that most learned man Palladius composed in the time of the Emperor Theodosius on the life and virtues of the blessed hermit Fathers, I once bore without complaint to write out when you pressed me to it: indeed, propping up my body and bending my joints, I soon set about the writing, judging that I could do nothing more profitable for you. But while I was eagerly hastening to bring the work I had begun to its end, I began to be sorely afflicted with a pain in the stomach. Meanwhile it happened one day that there came to me a venerable man, the lord Adhelrad, our fellow brother, and with him John, steward of the sacred palace of Salerno; and they, seeking to help me bear my sickness, began to set before me the holy, venerable and excellent memory of our most holy father, the lord Odo, knowing that above all things it was always dear and sweet to me either to tell others something about him or to draw some profit from him for myself. And I, not forgetting what is written, The peoples tell the wisdom of the saints, and the Church proclaims their praise (Sir 44:15), took up the subject of him with them, as they asked, and began to relate his origins. When they had heard it, they laid it upon me, if I loved him (as I then professed), to set down in writing without delay what I had spoken, so as to leave to those who

come after the riches of a good inheritance. So, turning over in my heart the commands of these men who loved me so warmly, I first kept silence for a little (as is the custom of monks), fearing that with rash lips I might rather dishonour the life of so great a man by telling it than describe it worthily; for neither did my speech adorn its words with the art of grammar, nor did I seem worthy to relate the life of this most holy man, even had I the gift of eloquence.

2

Having therefore taken up the work, I began with tears from the very marrow to call upon the Creator and Son of the Virgin, and upon the Holy Spirit, his equal, the giver of tongues and dispenser of speech, who opens the mouth of the dumb and makes eloquent the tongues of infants: that he who long ago willed me to grow cold to the world and to be kindled with love of so great a father might by his breath grant eloquence to one bereft of all help from letters. Wherefore, dearly beloved, since, driven by your exhortation, I have boldly taken up so great a work, deign to help me with your prayers, that I may bring it to its end. But if anyone should chance to read these things, or hear them while another reads, I beg him not to shudder or laugh, nor presume with rash lips to call them fictions, as though the world had been forsaken by God and the Church could no longer bring forth such a man, she to whom Christ long ago gave his promise, saying: Behold, I am with you always, to

the close of the age (Mt 28:20). Yet I call Jesus to witness that, besides these things which I relate, my master Arnulf used to tell me on oath many things about him at which he declared he had been present; and likewise Hucbert, bishop of the Tiberine Church, and one of our brethren named Landric: of these I have taken no care to write, and for no other reason than this, that since they did not eagerly follow his way I was unwilling to take their testimony; and yet, were I willing to write those things down, I think they would suffice for the praise of any ancient father or apostolic man. It has pleased me rather to write those things which I took from his own mouth, as though he were speaking of another, and committed to my memory. Then also what the lord Hildebrand declared to me and to many others, a truthful man indeed, prior of the monastery of Cluny and my teacher in the disciplines of the Rule. Meanwhile I beg you, dearest brethren, not to ask of me the names of his forebears and of the other men of Gaul among whom he grew up, whom I neither saw nor ever had the chance to see; and since I was then bound by the disciplines of the Rule, I was not even permitted to ask, all the more since the land of Italy bore me and nourished me within the precincts of the Church.

BOOK ONE

3

Odo, then, that most blessed man, sprang from the stock of the Franks, but was brought

up in the household of William, the most mighty duke of Aquitaine. In the nineteenth year of his age he was tonsured at Saint Martin's in Tours, and there he was educated in the liberal studies of the art of grammar. Afterwards at Paris he was instructed in dialectic and music by Remigius, a most learned man; and in the thirtieth year from his birth he went to Burgundy, and there for fifteen years he led the monastic life under Abbot Berno. Later, being ordained abbot, he became the leader and most loving father of the monasteries standing in the lands of the Franks, of Aquitaine and of the West, and in the city of Rome.

4

In the nine hundred and thirty-ninth year of the Lord's incarnation, then, the sixtieth of his age and the thirtieth of his monastic profession, coming to Rome he found me, wretch that I was, entangled in earthly bonds, and in his pity he fished me up in his net and brought me all the way to the monastery of Saint Peter situated at Pavia. Being detained there a short time by King Hugh, he handed me over to the aforesaid man, the lord Hildebrand, to be trained in the disciplines of the Rule. Not long afterwards, coming to Rome, he deigned to take me, unhappy as I was, as his companion; and him whom he had snatched from his parents as a canon when he went away, he brought back a monk on his return. In those days, moreover, as we journeyed together and talked by turns, I put aside my

shame, and as if I had set the monastic way far behind me, I boldly broke out and was not afraid to ask him closely about his birth and upbringing, his life and manner of living, and began to beg him all the more earnestly to deign to tell me of them. He, as was always his way, kept silence a little; then, wiping the flush from his face and drawing sighs from the depth of his heart, he began to tell me his origins: but his words were full of tears and groans.

5

"My father," he said, "was called Abbo, but he seemed to be of other ways and deeds than men of the present time now appear to be. He kept by heart the histories of the ancients and the Novels of Justinian. At his table the word of the Gospel was ever heard. And if ever a dispute arose in any way between parties, so great a truth had grown up in his judgement that all came to him from every side for the boon of his decision; for which reason he was dear to all, and above all to William, the most mighty count, who at that time held Aquitaine and Gothia by his own right. He was much accustomed to keep the vigils of the saints without sleeping. But that night on which peace was restored to angels and men, and Christ the Lord, visiting the world, came forth from the virgin womb like a bridegroom from the bridal chamber on high, he used to pass in silence with tears and prayers. While, then, he was keeping this watch with care, it was put into his mind to ask the Lord, for the sake of the Virgin's child-

bearing, to grant him a son; and by such urgency of prayer he obtained that a mother's womb already dead should be quickened once more. For my father often told some people that such was the manner of my birth.

6

"Now in that time of my infancy it happened that he went into the enclosure of the bedchamber and found me there in the cradle with no one watching; looking this way and that, and seeing no one, he lifted me up in his hands and, gazing upward in his heart, said: 'Receive this boy, Martin, jewel of priests'; and laying me down on the same little bed from which he had lifted me, he went away; but what he had done he would disclose to no one.

7

"After this, when I was weaned, he handed me over to a priest of his who lived in a more remote place, to be brought up and grounded in the study of letters. That priest afterwards confessed that in those days he had seen a vision such as this. 'I was looking, and behold, princes of the Churches began to demand the boy of me, and that insistently. And when I asked what they wished to do with him, whether to take him back to his father's house, they said they had not come for that, but to take him away to the lands of the East. But the priest, since he was unwilling to give him up, yet could not resist them, and knew not what

more to do, threw himself on the ground and turned to prayer, beseeching them to wreak their vengeance on him before they took the boy. Now he said he would suffer the father's vengeance, now that the parents would call him the boy's betrayer. To this one of them was reported to have answered: Lest the boy's father take vengeance on the priest, let us leave him for a time.' When the priest understood this revelation, he restored me to my parents. All this which you ask of me, my son, I heard thus from my father.

8

"Now it came to pass, when I had grown up, that I whom you now see an ugly old man was spoken of as a vigorous and handsome youth; and my father began little by little to draw me away from the clerical order and set me to military exercises; for which reason he placed me in the household of William, to serve the count. At length, leaving the study of letters, I began to give myself to the pursuits of huntsmen and fowlers. But almighty God, who grants salvation to the unwilling and calls the things that are not as though they were (Rom 4:17), began to terrify me in dreams and to show me that my life was bent towards evil; and besides this he turned all my hunting into weariness. For the more I threw myself into such sports, the more I came home sorrowful, empty-handed and worn out with weariness.

9

"In those days my father urged me to keep the solemn watches of the vigils, as he himself was wont to keep them. Some years later, I made ready to keep the vigil of the Lord's Nativity; and when I had passed part of the night awake, it suddenly came into my mind to beseech the Mother of the Lord Jesus for my life. Then, praying, I began to say: 'O Lady, Mother of mercy, on this night you brought forth the Saviour for the world; deign to be my advocate. To your glorious and singular childbearing I flee, most loving one; incline the ears of your kindness to my prayers. I am sorely afraid lest my life displease your Son; and since, Lady, he manifested himself to the world through you, for your sake I beg him to have mercy on me without delay.' Amid these prayers, the morning Lauds and the solemnities of the Masses, the next day had dawned; and behold, as was its custom, the white-robed choir of canons was present; and while the singing of many voices rose in the praises of so great a feast, I sprang into their midst like an impatient youth and began to praise with them the newborn King of the world. I know and confess that I acted unseemly; yet, keeping in my heart that word of David which is written, I did not presume to do it without reason: Praise the Lord, all you nations; praise him together, all you peoples (Ps 117:1). At once an exceeding pain seized my head, which racked me for a little and then went away. Then, when the Gospel had been read, the same pain of the head seized me again, and had I not stretched out my arms and caught hold of the railings of

the church, I would at once have fallen headlong from my full height as if lifeless. So greatly did that pain torment me that whenever it came no hope of life remained in me even for the space of a moment. This befell me at the beginning of my sixteenth year, and for the three years that followed I was furrowed by that ploughshare. For this reason I was taken back to my parents' house, and for two years they applied to me every kind of cure; but the more abundant and manifold the medicines I took, the further the remedies of health fled from me. In those days my father, with heavy grief and many sighs, told how my birth had come about in the manner I have described, adding moreover: 'Behold, blessed Martin, what I offered freely you now demand in full. Truly, as is fitting, you are ready to hear a vow, but you drive a hard bargain.' At last, despairing of any cure, I thought that one comfort remained, if I fled eagerly to him: that is, that to him to whom I had been given without knowing it, I should now, laying aside the hair of my head, give my service anew, knowing that so it had been done. There you have, my son, the beginning of my birth and the outset of my religious life: mark that I did nothing good of my own accord. Judge, however, of my poor ways as seems right to you, provided only that you unceasingly bless, proclaim and glorify the mercy that has looked upon me."

10

Thereafter he was seen to have such devotion to blessed Martin that he loved him above the

other saints and daily commended himself to his protection, keeping him in his heart wherever he was, proclaiming him with his lips, following him in his deeds. For behold, not more than six years ago, while the various orders of the church were keeping the vigils before his body, it happened that Odo himself was present there. Now since the antiphons of that office, as is plain to all, are short, and the nights at that season longer, they wished to draw out the office until daybreak, and so sang each antiphon over again after every verse of the psalms. And this was a grievous labour for them. At length they came to him and, as though with one mouth, besought him, saying: "Long have we awaited your coming, father, that you might relieve us of so great a labour. Now that you are here, we pray you, compose for us other antiphons on the life of blessed Martin, your lord, whose length may duly take from us our weariness with these very short ones." He began to say not only that he could not compose them, but that even if someone else had composed them, his age would deny him all time to learn them; and meanwhile he began to praise the brevity of these and to profess disgust at the length of those they asked for. But they urged on the contrary that if he did otherwise he would offend Martin, adding that such an excuse betokened pride in disguise. Overcome by these words mingled with prayers, our father Odo soon applied himself with effort to the task of so great a labour. He composed three hymns in his praise, of which I have judged it fit to insert in this

work a sample of one only. "O Christ the King, Martin's glory: here is your praise, and you are his; grant that we may worship you in him, nay, him in you." Likewise he composed twelve antiphons, each with three variations, whose words and harmony of voices so agree together that nothing seems to be found either fuller or less in sense, nor sweeter in the measures of the music. They are kept to this day at Benevento. Never in the morning, never in the evening was Martin's memory absent from his breast and his lips; he kept in his heart the one whom he proclaimed with his mouth: "O Martin, O loving one, how loving a thing it is to rejoice in you, O Martin," and the rest. But since the place has fitly offered itself for this narrative, I shall tell, with the Lord's help, when I come to set out his life more fully, the things which blessed Martin willed to work through him. Meanwhile let us return to the point from which we digressed.

11

So in the nineteenth year of his age Odo, that most blessed man, took refuge with blessed Martin and received the office of a cleric. What a throng of great men gathered there, and with what pomp, I prefer to pass over in silence rather than tell, lest I seem to wrong the poverty that followed, with which he was later content. Among them was Count Fulk, who had brought him up: he at once gave him a cell beside the church of blessed Martin, and obtained for him a daily living from that same chapter of canons and

granted it to him. But that most blessed man, a lover of poverty, despising the glory of the world, cared only to please God. So day after day he toiled at reading, and by night he gave himself to prayer, knowing that it is written: He who does not know shall not be known (1 Cor 14:38).

12

In those days, moreover, our most skilful pilot, who by his guidance taught us to cross the whirlpools of this world, swam across the boundless sea of Priscian. And when he wished to read the poems of Virgil, there was shown to him in a vision a certain vessel, most beautiful without but full of serpents within, by which he suddenly saw himself surrounded, yet not bitten; and on waking he understood the serpents to be the teaching of the poets, the vessel in which they lurked the book of Virgil, and the way along which he walked so thirstily to be Christ.

13

Now I shall briefly describe how great a virtue of patience began afterwards to flow forth in him. Leaving the songs of the poets, then, and taught by the spirit of high counsel, he turned wholly to the expositors of the Gospels and the Prophets. Meanwhile nearly all the canons began to rage against him with rabid barking. “What do you mean to do?” they said. “Why do you seek to meddle in another's work? You lost the reward of this work together with the flower of

your youth. Spare yourself; leave these hopelessly tangled writings and go off to the psalms." But the same Spirit who had earlier taught him to keep silence even from good words now taught him to hold his peace before evil ones. With bowed head, stopped ears and eyes fixed on the ground, he turned over in his heart that word of David: I said, I will guard my ways, that I may not sin with my tongue. I have set a guard upon my mouth (Ps 39:2). Nor was he forgetful of the Lord's promise: In your patience you will possess your souls (Lk 21:19). What remains concerning his patience I shall describe, with the Lord's help, in what follows.

14

Now I shall pass on more quickly to his contempt of possessions. Let those who will, then, praise the casters-out of demons, the raisers of the dead, and the other men renowned for miracles. I, the least of all, shall praise first my Odo's virtue of patience, then his contempt of possessions, after that his winning of souls, his restoring of monasteries, the clothing and food of monks, the peace of the Churches, the concord of kings and princes, the safeguarding of all the roads, his earnestness in the commandments, his perseverance in vigils and prayers, his care for the poor, his correcting of the young, his honouring of the old, his amendment of morals, his love of virgins, his comforting of the continent, his mercy towards the wretched, his unblemished observance of the Rule, and lastly the pattern of

all the virtues. The good Jesus was then planting in a little plot, with trees from many groves, a paradise of monks, from which to water the hearts of the faithful. Content, then, with a tiny cell, and withdrawn from the eyes of all, he made haste to please God alone. Having given away to the poor all that he had brought with him for his bodily use, he took no thought for the morrow, according to the precept of the Gospel. By night he withdrew from the sight of men and went alone to pray at the tomb of blessed Martin, which was nearly two miles distant from that cell: not leaning on a companion's side, nor steadied by the support of a staff, but carrying in his hand only two writing tablets, most fit for the office of writing, so joined by a craftsman's skill that they could be opened but not separated, such as students are wont to wear on the right thigh. But the enemy of the good began to bring terrors upon him such as these. From both sides of the road foxes came out on every hand, which at first followed close at his back and watched him, and then threw themselves in his face. And when they saw that the ardent man could not be turned aside from the straight road he had set himself, they yelped, rushed upon him with gaping jaws and threatened to strangle him. But he neither fled nor gave up: drawing up his legs and stiffening his neck, he protected himself only with his shoulders and arms. At last, yielding his whole body to their teeth, he guarded only his throat from the deadly bite; and behold, suddenly a wolf came running up at full speed, freed him from

their attacks, and thenceforth became his companion and his familiar. But lest anyone think this unseemly or hard to believe, let him read the life of blessed Paul written by blessed Jerome; and there he will find that that man's grave was prepared by lions. And if this one example does not satisfy him even so, let him pass to the life of blessed Ammon, and he will find that his cell was guarded against robbers by two dragons. Then let us return to the same Jerome, and let him pass on to our own Florentius of Nursia, whose life blessed Pope Gregory set forth in his Dialogue: there you will find that Jerome was granted a lion as keeper of his asses, and Florentius a fierce bear to guard his flock. From then on he went his way more securely, and ever keeping in his heart your testimonies, good Jesus, and echoing them back to you, he sang with his lips, saying: Truly you are faithful, Lord, in your words, and holy in all your works. You lift up all who fall, and raise up all who are bowed down (Ps 145:13-14). For, the order reversed, the wolf protected from being eaten the one it is sometimes wont to eat, and frightened the foxes by which it is wont to be frightened. What temptations, then, the devil assailed him with invisibly, as it were, I beg no one to ask of me. Yet to establish belief in the matter, namely what he could have borne in patient endurance when assailed invisibly by suggestion, I think the visible battle I have described may suffice for all who read to believe it. When by night he went out to pray from the cell where he lived, he did not shut its little door behind him: for he feared

to lose nothing, since he was content with a mat on the bare ground and the clothes he wore.

15

Meanwhile it happened, as he was reading volumes of various books, that he came upon the Rule of blessed Benedict; and as he meant to pass through it quickly, he stumbled on the place where monks are commanded to sleep clothed; and plainly not understanding its sense, for three years he lay down clothed, and, though not yet a monk, bore the light yoke of monks. He was careful to obey the precepts of the one saint, and longed to imitate the life of the other. For the Lord Jesus was then casting simple seeds into rough ground, from which he foresaw that he would reap a hundredfold harvest.

16

But this is wonderful: that the fairness of his body was not changed by the grime in which he lay on the ground, and the strength of his spirit was not worn down by long and unbroken fasting. Indeed, in these two years just past, when we used to visit together the shrines of the saints within and without the city of Rome for the sake of prayer, our youth could not go before his venerable old age of sixty years, nor even keep up with it; and when, worn out, we begged him to spare himself and us, he would say: "Surely you see that I have lost all my strength. Long old age has made me a man with one foot in the grave.

Behold, it is thirty years that I have been such as you now see me." So he, groaning, would declare his weakness to us; but we marvelled with great astonishment at his strength, and not without reason: for he who had not suffered himself to be overcome by corruption ought not to be laid low by decay. He thought little indeed of whatever virtue he saw in himself; but he esteemed highly whatever he could see in another. In that early time of his life he was sustained by half a pound of bread and a handful of beans, and (which is against the nature of the Franks) by very little drink. So, laying down every perishable burden, the soldier of Christ, with breast bared, girt himself and bore his arms unencumbered. All saw this raw recruit go before the ranks of veterans, and, trusting in Christ, he strove to bring back glorious spoil from the enemy. All this took place at the church of blessed Martin in Tours. That place is fruitful in every virtue, marvellous in wonders, rich in wealth, and shining with every kind of devotion. And it is fitting that the place should be wonderful which was worthy to have so great an indweller. For Martin is not only a martyr or a rich confessor, but the light of the world and the jewel of priests: kings hasten there, and princes of many nations often resort there with gifts and vows.

17

It happened meanwhile that very many of these came in to visit him: those who knew him to see an acquaintance again, those who did not

to make him their acquaintance. And he, like an overflowing spring, offered to all the draughts they longed for, and as from an open library he furnished fitting examples to all: to this one enjoining chastity, on that one laying sobriety; this one he teaches to despise the world, another he warns not to covet his neighbour's goods. To each he furnished abundantly whatever was needful; he wept over this most wretched world, and declared that it would soon fall in ruin together with its lovers. So he warned all to live sparingly and not to embrace what is wrongly coveted, and wholly to rein in the gluttony of the belly, saying: "He who stuffs the belly feeds lust." To the lustful he set before them the dragon's headlong fall, saying: "Alas for those wretches, for the dragon draws after him the third part of the stars (Rev 12:4)." To drunkards and gluttons he would say: "Nebuzaradan, the chief of the cooks, destroyed the walls of Jerusalem." To the effeminate and to those who lie with men he set before them the slaughter wrought by Herod and the exile of the Scribe. "As much as the soul is better than the body," he said, "so much worse than Herod is he who does such things. Herod slew bodies and sent souls to heaven; this man parts bodies from God and slaughters souls with eternal death. The Scribe who mustered the recruits was led captive into Egypt; but this man after death is to be led into hell." So the teacher wept over their fall and said: "See, O Lord, how the city full of riches has been made desolate (Lam 1:1)"; and again he would say: "Woe to you, Behemoth, you never

cease, O wickedness! You strew gold beneath you like mud, and the rays of the sun are under you (Job 41:22)." Hearing these things, one was terrified, conscious of his sin; another, innocent, was gladdened by his word of comfort: and as from a single storehouse different men took different foods. I call Jesus to witness that I never heard such sweetness of speech from the mouth of man. In him was fulfilled what the Lord says in the Gospel: The kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old (Mt 13:52). So all, seasoned with divine salt and filled with the heavenly dish, went back to their homes giving thanks.

18

They offered him many gifts and presents; but of these he would accept nothing, for having given away his own most lavishly, he did not know how he could accept what belonged to others. Once, overcome by his aforesaid lord, he accepted, willing or not, a hundred shillings sent by him. But the soldier of Christ would not suffer them to stay with him even for a moment, and, as before, at once distributed them to the needy. Meanwhile the pupil began to go before the ranks of his teachers, and to become an example to those who came after.

19

In those days he went to Paris, and there read through the dialectic of Saint Augustine,

written for his son Adeodatus, and often studied Martianus on the liberal arts: in all these things he had Remigius for his teacher; and when this was done he returned to Tours.

20

At that time he was asked by brethren who loved him to condense for them the Moralia of blessed Pope Gregory into a single volume. But he declared that he could by no means do this, adding that even if he had the ability, he ought not to do it, lest he should seem to alter or take away anything from the labour of so great a man and the worth of so great a work. They objected, on the contrary, that they would sooner sink under it than bear so great a labour, and judged it better to abandon it altogether and pass on to the other Scriptures than to perish beneath it as under a heavy load. And every day there was no small dispute among them about this matter. I know, however, that many will take offence at this, and to calm them it has pleased me to insert this account. For this was not done out of arrogance, but by the Lord's disposing, that the lamp which had been hidden under the bushel might be set upon the mountain. What we have said will appear more plainly from the example of what follows. While they persisted in this request, it happened that one night the lord Odo was at his customary prayer in the church of the lord Martin; and behold, sleep suddenly stole upon him, and in that vision he saw a choir of saints coming down from above into that same

church. First they blessed the Lord; then they sat down in order in the stalls, and after a little one of them sprang into the midst and said: "Why is it that we are lingering in this place?" The others said they were waiting for Pope Gregory. Hearing this, our father Odo, like an eager searcher, began to look this way and that, to see from what side he might see him coming. Then, lifting his eyes upward, he sees blessed Gregory as if sent from heaven, but resplendent and adorned beyond all who had gone before him, in countenance, in beauty and in bearing. As soon as he came, all rise and, bowing their necks, ask his blessing. He did not come all the way down among them, but stopped above the ambo of the church, and called blessed Odo, who lay prostrate on the ground, saying: "Rise, brother Odo, do not fear." When he had risen, he saw, as a scribe wears it, a pen fixed over Gregory's ear, sharpened to a long point as if by a master's hand, and set fast at the top. The blessed man took it and, handing it to him, said: "Go on, then, without fear, and finish the work laid upon you. The book you compose will not be blotted out, and mine shall stand for ever." And waking at once, he straightway understood what he had seen. Then, taking that great volume, he read it through carefully, and gathered into a single volume the soundest part, as he judged it, and so indeed he silenced the murmuring.

21

It came to pass afterwards that the aforesaid Count Fulk, I know not how, took two little

golden vessels from the treasury of blessed Martin; but, held fast by the bridle of avarice and unwilling to return them, he was struck with a heavy punishment. Brought to the point of death, he had himself carried to the tomb of blessed Martin; and there he promised a great many gifts, but even so he did not receive the gift of health. Worn down, moreover, for a very long time, he grew so weak that he awaited the end of death. When the lord Odo came in to visit him, he said to him: "Wretched man, give back the little vessels of blessed Martin which you unhappily took away, and at once you will be healed." He promised both to return them and to give others besides, if the event proved the truth of the word. At once, lifted up by the hands of our father and of his attendants, he was brought to the body of blessed Martin and lay prostrate on the ground; nor could the help promised him brook delay: but he who had come on men's hands, as if carried on a litter, recovered the use of his limbs and began to walk back on his own feet. And so it came about that, being corrected, he committed no such thing thereafter, and faithfully fulfilled what he had promised. Meanwhile father Odo began to urge him to leave the world and to make it his only care how he might please God alone. But he answered: "You cannot persuade me of this now. But I have a most dear knight, Adhegrin by name, valiant in arms and wise in counsel, who, if he hears you, will soon obey your will"; and so it came to pass afterwards. Within a few days, having recovered all his strength,

he returned home. When people flocked to him from every side to rejoice with him on his recovery, he took up the tale and began to tell those standing round what and how much he had suffered, adding moreover how swift a power he had found in the words of the lord Odo.

22

Now one of those standing by, and one who listened inwardly, was the aforesaid Adhegrin; and at once, pierced to the heart, he disposed of all that he possessed and came back to Odo in haste. So, laying aside the hair of his head and his worldly knighthood, from then on he became a champion of Christ. Then our father took all that he had brought for his own bodily use and poured it into the laps of the poor, as he had done earlier with his own goods. The two knights of the palace lived together, content with a very small hut. Seeing, then, that the world lies in wickedness, and that its lovers keep to a ruinous way full of allurements, they hastened daily to climb the heights of the monastic life. Meanwhile there was no place within the bounds of Francia where they heard there was a monastery to which they did not either go themselves or send their scouts; and, finding among them no house of religion where they could find rest, they would return to that hut in great sorrow. For this reason Adhegrin resolved to go to Rome. Having at last set out on his way, he came into the borders of Burgundy and arrived at a certain village called by the name of Baume. There was in it a monastery lately built

by Abbot Berno; he turned aside there, and was received by him most courteously in the guest house according to the Rule of blessed Benedict; and he chose to stay there some time as a guest, not that he needed anything of theirs, but that he might come to know the ways of those who lived there and the customs of the place. Now the founders of that place were followers of a certain father Euticius: the merit of whose life and the manner of his conversation I have chosen not to insert in this work; but what kind of death he was granted I have taken care to commend to your memory.

23

This man lived in the times of the great Emperor Louis, dear to the king because he was lovable to all. Though he was a layman and learned in foreign studies, he forsook the things in which human frailty is wont to take pride, and gave himself wholly to the rules and institutes of the blessed Fathers; from these authorities he gathered various customs and bound them together in one volume. Not long afterwards he became a monk, and was held in such love by the king that he built him a monastery within the palace. When he had run the course of this present life, with the brethren standing all around, he suddenly breathed his last. And it happened, while his disciples were preparing the funeral of their loving father, that behold, he who had been dead returned alive. To them, astonished and wondering, father Euticius said: "Thanks be to God;

know that in these forty years I do not remember taking food on a single day without first having wept. But today the Lord has taken away my grief and comforted me, and has granted me a place of rest among the choirs of angels." Saying this, he went to his everlasting rest. This father Euticius was the founder of these customs which are kept to this day in our monasteries; and the venerable Adhegrin, seeing them, took care to report them as quickly as possible to our father Odo. And he, taking with him a hundred volumes of books, at once moved to that same monastery: he who before had been the follower became afterwards the standard-bearer; while the lord Adhegrin shut himself up in a cell, and with the leave of Abbot Berno remained in it for three years. Upon father Odo, because he was a man of learning, they laid the laborious charge of the school. He was then thirty years of age.

24

I confess, I say, that I had thought to pass through the life of our most holy father simply and in haste; but my poor wit, like a violent rebel, wants to tell, along with his life, of the men it knows to have been his companions here. Wherefore I beg that, just as it does not irk me to toil under so great a labour, so it may not seem burdensome or heavy to you to receive it. For it seems just and well pleasing before God that, to adorn our discourse, the examples of those whom he carried across from this pilgrimage to

the homeland in his happy haven should be described together with his life.

25

The venerable Adhegrin, then, of whom we made mention above, afterwards obtained leave and went into the wilderness, and there confined himself in a small cave. It happened one day that he was gripped by exceeding distress, and since no one was there to offer words of comfort or the example of some father — as Wisdom says: Woe to him who is alone, for if he falls he has no one to stretch out a hand to him (Eccl 4:10) — he sank, like a stream running downhill, very nearly to despair; and behold, suddenly there stood by him a most radiant man, who gently asked him what ailed him, or for what cause it had befallen him to plunge himself as it were to the very brink. He answered, saying: "From the time I began to serve the Lord without ceasing, I have not been granted any consolation from him in any way; for this reason I am in sore anguish, for I do not know whether my service pleases him, or whether for so great a labour I shall ever be worthy to receive a reward." At once the man fell upon his neck and, kissing him, said: "Believe that you will never be unworthy of the good things of the Lord." And having comforted him with these words, he went away.

26

At another time it chanced that the tempter caught him outside the cell in which he lived, and at once fell upon him, carried him up to the edge of a most monstrous cliff, and sought with all his might to hurl him down from there. But what was the soldier of Christ to do, who could not stand upright there? He had no idea at all how he could resist. But when he was at the very point of death, blessed Martin suddenly stood by him, and taking his hand said to him: "What is this, and how did you come here?" He said: "I do not know, my lord." Then, strengthening him, he set him back in his place.

27

About five years ago, when father Odo was going to Rome to rebuild, at the urging of the lord pope and of all the orders of the Holy See, the monastery within the church of the most blessed apostle Paul, as it had once been, he resolved first to visit the man of whom we have spoken and consult him on this matter, that there might be done what is written: Do all things with counsel, and you will not repent after the deed (Sir 32:19). And it came to pass, while they were inquiring together about this matter and conversing long about many spiritual things, that father Odo began to beg him to share with him as a friend whatever had been divinely revealed to him in that time. Then the lord Adhegrin, remembering their old companionship and at once kindled with the fire of charity, answered, saying: "On such a day, at such an hour, when I had finished

the course of psalmody, blessed Martin suddenly stood by me, and his radiant face, and the almost accustomed familiarity he showed after his blessing, soon gave me freedom to speak: and after we had exchanged a few words, I began to ask him where he was going and whence he came. He answered, saying: 'I come from Rome and am going to Francia: since you lie near my road, I have turned aside to visit you.' Then, giving thanks, I began to beseech him that, since he had deigned to visit a sinner, he would deign to rest under his hut, even for a little. But he said: 'Today the consecration of Louis, king of the Franks, takes place, and I am hastening to be present at his anointing; and for that reason I can brook no delay.' To this I answered: 'If it is so that you wish to go, I pray you first deign to bless me.' But he said: 'No, I tell you, you have no need to be blessed by me. For he who once blessed me has blessed you likewise.' And when I pressed him without ceasing to bless me, he at once added on his side that I should likewise bless him, declaring moreover that he would in no way yield to me unless I gave him a blessing in return; whence there arose between us no small friendly contest. He refused because he did not wish to; I, because I did not dare. So it came about that, after we had first blessed each other, he at once withdrew and went away, and left me in great sorrow." To prove the truth of this, however, father Odo was there as a most faithful witness, who ordered that day and hour to be noted down, and afterwards, inquiring carefully

into everything, found that it had all happened as Adhegrin had told.

28

More than thirty years have now gone by, unless I am mistaken, since he began to live in that wilderness, and only on Sundays or the chief feasts is he wont to come down to the monastery of Saint Peter which is called Cluny, since it is nearly two miles off: taking a little flour, from which he makes his bread, and a few grains of beans, he at once returns to the wilderness. Wine he never used at all, and his food is not seasoned with fat or oil. At all seasons he suffers cold and heat: heat between his shoulders, cold in his hands and arms. But since we have been pursuing this man's life, let us return as quickly as we may to our purpose, from which we have digressed far. But again I remember that I promised first to set forth the patience of father Odo, which is the kindling of all the virtues, and then, as time went on, to tell carefully of his other virtues. Therefore, with the Lord's help, as far as my strength allows, I shall hasten to fulfil my promise.

29

There were in that same monastery of which we have spoken certain brethren whose life and ways you will find in the account that follows. Hearing that the lord Odo had come there to take up the religious life, they approached him with feigned friendliness and pretended to ask why

he had come there. And when they had received his answer to what they asked, they said: "All of us are seeking to flee this community, so that we may save our souls; and you on the contrary come here to lose yours?" When he asked them why they said this, they went on: "Do you know the ways of Abbot Berno?" He said: "Not at all." And they: "Alas, alas, if you knew how harshly he knows how to treat a monk! Blows follow his rebuke; and those he beats he then binds with fetters, tames with prison, afflicts with fasts: and when the wretch has suffered all this, even so he cannot win his favour." Hearing this, the lord Odo began little by little to waver about entering. Seeing him, the aforesaid Adhegrin at once sprang into their midst and said: "Father Odo, do not be afraid; these words are not the speaker's own, but his who prompts them. Mark it well, and see that the devil is speaking through their mouths." At once they went back abashed. And father Odo, with Adhegrin his companion, bowed their necks to the most sweet yoke of Christ. For this reason blessed Benedict, since he foreknew what was to come, laid down in the disciplines of the Rule that no one should speak with a guest unless he had been given leave by the superior. For how many, deceived in this way at the outset of the holy life, have turned back, and fallen from the warmth of inward longing into the torpor of a perverse will? And though Scripture says, Test the spirits, whether they are of God (1 Jn 4:1), yet the testing of the faithful and of those who seek the Lord ought not to be of this kind, since the

Lord, through the prophet, commands those who are aflame with the warmth of the Holy Spirit, saying: You who are in the south, run to meet with bread those who come from the north (Isa 21:14). But the soldier of Christ, as he had not embraced flatteries, so neither was he shaken by terrors. Of such men as these blessed Job rightly speaks thus: Let them curse it who curse the day, who are ready to rouse up Leviathan (Job 3:8).

30

It pleases me meanwhile to set aside for a little the life of our father Odo, so that I may be allowed to linger somewhat in setting forth the customs of that place, in order that what follows may be clearer. For it was the custom of that place that the master of the school should not go anywhere alone with a single boy, not even to relieve nature, nor should a boy presume to speak to him alone in private; but for the sake of good witness he should always take another of the boys, or one of the brethren, as companion in his going or his speaking. And if it were night and a boy happened to need to go out to the privy, he would not dare to set foot outside the dormitory without the light of a lantern and another brother. At mealtime there was never lacking a reading at both tables; and the crumbs that came from cutting the bread each one carefully gathered up before him, and ate them with thanksgiving before the reading ended. Once the reading was ended, no one dared to eat either them or any other food. These crumbs they held to be more sacred than other

food. For they told of a miracle such as this that had shone forth from them in those same years.

31

There was a certain brother in that monastery, very worthy and dear to all. When he came to the point of death, while the brethren stood round who had come to commend his spirit to the Lord with prayer, he suddenly lifted up his voice and cried out, saying: "Help me, I beg you, my lords, for God's sake! Just now," he said, "I was snatched away to judgement, and there the devil, the accuser of mankind, brought out against me as evidence a little sack full of the crumbs of bread which I would not eat according to the custom, and which fell from the table." And after a little he began again to cry out terribly and say: "Behold, the devil of whom I told you is here, bringing that little sack." And as the terrified brethren wondered, he added again: "He is there in that place; do you not see him?" Then he fortified himself all over with the sign of the cross, and amid the words of prayer gave up his spirit. From that day, then, the crumbs were gathered with all diligence.

32

There is among them also another manner of silence. At unfitting hours no one within the cloister of that monastery dares to speak, or to join himself to another brother. And when twelve lessons are kept, no one dares to speak

within that cloister on the following day, except in chapter. In the octave of the Lord's Nativity and of his Resurrection, the deepest silence was kept among them day and night. This very short silence, they declared, signified that eternal silence. For whenever necessary things had to be asked for, as many different signs were made to one another to accomplish it, which I think the grammarians would have called the notes of the fingers and the eyes. So far had this practice grown among them that I think, if they had been without the use of the tongue, these signs alone would have sufficed to express all that was needful. But on ordinary days and in the other octaves of the saints this distinction was observed. On ordinary days, across the courses of the day and the night, they sang one hundred and thirty-eight psalms, of which we have taken away fourteen for the sake of the faint-hearted, besides the special prayers which our brethren often say, which indeed seem to exceed the measure of the psalter. Likewise with two Masses, and as many litanies. At each of the canonical hours they knelt twice. In the octaves we have mentioned, they sang only seventy-five across those courses, knelt once, and ate twice. There are a great many other things which I think it best not to insert in this work, for the sake of readers easily wearied.

33

So when Odo took up the mastership of the school, a fitting occasion soon offered itself for his patience to be tried. Night came, and behold,

one of the boys asked by a sign to go out to relieve nature. Now that place was so close to the dormitory that the lamp which burned there by the authority of the Rule lit it all. So father Odo rose, woke another of the boys, and, content with that light alone, went with him. The next day, when the brethren had assembled in chapter as is the custom, and the Martyrology and the verse were ended and the Rule had been read, they began to rebuke him severely for having gone after the boy during the night without a candle. But since no one dares to plead his cause before asking pardon, nor to defend his view after asking it, he at once fell to the ground and asked pardon, saying that the light of the dormitory could suffice him. Yet he was not only not heard by them, but on the contrary was adjudged guilty of a grave fault. Then that most blessed man, who had taken the narrow road and come to follow him who when he suffered did not threaten (1 Pet 2:23), without indignation or murmuring, and without setting up complaints against their opposition, but seeking every passing moment, lay prostrate on the ground and begged for pardon. His abbot, wishing to try his patience, feigned anger, and pronounced a sentence bound with excommunication, that he should not ask him for pardon any more that day. But he, turning over in his breast that word of David who says, I have become like a beast of burden before you, and I will be always with you (Ps 73:22-23), and again, You laid afflictions on our backs; you set men over our heads (Ps 66:11-12), went and threw himself at the feet

of the brethren, asking them to go and seek pardon of the abbot in his stead; and this was done. At last Abbot Berno, marvelling at such patience in a young man, at once called him, and according to the Rule healed that disturbance with a blessing; and from then on he became dearer to him.

34

Now there were in that same community the brethren, young in mind and in conduct, whom we mentioned above. From the very thing by which they ought to have made progress, they went to their ruin. For whenever they could find a place or occasion, they cast at him all kinds of insults and false reproaches. But Odo, that man of peace, would take them aside and, innocent though he was, throw himself at their feet as if guilty, asking pardon, not from fear of men but from brotherly love, that by patience he might correct those whom he saw incurring the vengeance of God. At times they were at last restrained by his patience; but, like running water, they at once returned to their own vices. For the man they ought to have imitated, they persecuted instead. The ringleader of this plague was called Guy. Often, when one urged another to revile him, the one who was sent would say: "What use is it to do this every day, when we can neither drive him away nor provoke him to an insult? For you know that he is more learned than we are. Up to now, whatever I have wished to learn from him he has gladly taught me. I fear, I tell you, that some day, broken by so many

injuries, he may begin unwillingly to withhold what he now freely bestows." But the other said: "It is not as you claim. Brother Odo is such a man that he bears not only these things or the like, but worse; and after that he will gladly give you what you want." And indeed, after a little while they were struck by the vengeance of God by his just judgement, since brotherly correction could not restrain them. For when Berno, who was then the father of that monastery, had died, they at once laid aside the habit of religion and returned to the world, and afterwards earned a most dreadful death.

35

Our father, indeed, is wont to tell that this miracle too took place there at that time. There was a brother in that community who had this habit: when he sat at table, he gave his whole mind to the reading. One day it happened that, when he had gathered the crumbs as usual, the aforesaid abbot brought the reading to an end before he had eaten them. He did not know at all what to do. For he dared not eat them after the reading had ended, nor leave them lest they should by chance be lost. Closing his fist, he judged it right that, when they had come back after the verse, they should be kept for the father of the monastery. And so, when they had returned from the oratory, he at once threw himself at the father's feet. When he was asked why he was asking pardon, and wished to show with open hand what had happened, all those crumbs had

been changed into the likeness of pearls. Glorifying the Lord, they were wonderfully amazed. Then, at the father's command, they were woven into an ornament of that church. And Odo is wont to tell these things of himself, as though of another. From that time he began to burn within himself to rescue his parents, that he might draw them out of the bonds of this world. So it came about that not long afterwards, having obtained leave, he went to his father, brought him to the monastery and made him a monk; and he had his mother clothed with the sacred veil: whose life, indeed, had I been allowed to write it, would seem rather a history than a leaflet.

36

It came to pass in those days that one evening, when he had turned aside late to rest in the house of a certain most noble man, the masters being away, their daughter, a maiden now grown, was there with the household; and all evening long she set herself to watch his doings and his manner of life with great attention. Then, pierced to the heart, she came secretly to him by a back door, and throwing herself at his feet, said that she was condemned to be given in marriage soon; and she begged him, for the sake of the God whose servant he professed himself, to set her free that very night. Hearing this, the soldier of Christ, not knowing what to do or how to satisfy the wish of so noble a maiden, began to be sorely troubled within himself. Having, after his manner, love towards God, and love too over

the maiden's tears, he set before himself the judgement of God and the ruin of her soul, and the outcry of her kinsmen and of the people against him: that a monk had dared to do such things. But, overcome by the love of God and the maiden's sobs, he at last consented to her rescue. That night, when all the servants of the house were asleep, he and the brother who was with him mounted their horses and went on ahead, and by his order the servants who attended him took the maiden and followed. The next day they reached the monastery. Now near that monastery an oratory had been built, where women of the highest rank were received for the sake of prayer; there he arranged for her to stay, and then went on to the monastery. The following day, as is the custom, he was careful to tell the father of the monastery all that he had done. When the abbot heard what he had done concerning the maiden, he began with troubled countenance to rebuke him severely for having dared to do this without leave. At once he fell to the ground and, throwing himself at his feet, begged for pardon. Afterwards, raised from the ground at the father's command, and questioned again, he answered, saying: “My lord father, ever since you deigned to receive me, wretch that I am, as far as I have been able to observe, you have had no other care than the winning of souls. Other abbots are eager for this: how they may abound in possessions and please men. But you, relying on kindness and mercy, strive to please God alone for the winning of souls; and since I

have longed to be your imitator in this, I wished to win this maiden to the praise of your name. For though her tears overcame me only slowly, I did not forget your rebuke, which I knew most surely I could not escape: but I preferred to be struck by the scourge of a loving father rather than be held guilty for her soul. Would that I could have won all the women dwelling in this province who are held by the bond of the flesh, and that you had had to scourge me, in your most loving way, for each one of them!" With these and similar words he soothed the father's displeasure; but the abbot at once laid on him this obedience: "Go, and as you knew how to snatch her from the world, so know how to feed her every day and instruct her with holy counsels, lest she should ever repent and, at the devil's prompting, return to the world." And after this father Odo began to bring her food every day and to instruct her by the examples of the Fathers who had gone before, until within a few days he took her to a monastery and joined her to the holy virgins. All this, however, was done in the presence of the brethren, for the sake of good witness. It came to pass not long afterwards that she fell asleep in the Lord. And when the sisters had gathered round her to shield her spirit with their prayers, and held her as already all but dead, she suddenly began to say, with what voice she could: "Help me, I beg you, to rise." When they asked her why she said this, she said: "Behold, I see the most blessed apostle Paul coming, and I want to go to meet him." She had hardly finished the words when, stretching out

her arms to rise more quickly, she repeated the same words again. The others thought she was out of her mind. Meanwhile, as far as she could, she raised herself on her knees, and with bowed head asked a blessing of him who was coming, in these words: “Bless me”; and at once she went to her everlasting rest. So no one doubted that she had been received by him by whom she had been visited.

37

Father Berno, then, foreseeing that he would be a man of the highest worth, advanced him, and, summoning a bishop, had him consecrated priest against his will. Of this bishop father Odo is wont to tell that no dog dared to eat food he had blessed; and if by chance it happened, the dog at once died, as though it had tasted something poisonous instead of food. But I beg that no one disparage me for saying that he was consecrated against his will, lest perhaps whoever attempts to do so should seem to be one of those who are not afraid to buy or sell the gift of the Holy Spirit. So on the night that followed the day of his ordination, when he woke from the night's sleep and, not remembering his consecration, found round his neck (as is the custom) the stole the bishop had given him, he at once gave himself to lamentation, as if some great evil had befallen him; and for a long time afterwards, from excessive shame, he did not know with what face he could go out of the monastery. So it came about that father Berno, finding some occasion,

sent him to that same bishop. And when that bishop, chiefly to console him, drew out a long discourse on the height of the priesthood, it happened that the talk between them turned to the state of the Church. Then father Odo began to set before him from the prophecy of Jeremiah a mournful discourse about priests; and when he had finished, the bishop began to ask him to write that discourse down for him and compose it in the form of a little book. Father Odo on his side put before him the Rule, in which it is laid down that a monk may do nothing without the leave of his superior. So the bishop went to the monastery for this purpose. And since he was a firm friend of the father of whom we have spoken, he at once obtained from him what he wished; and then, at Berno's command, Odo composed three little books from the prophecy of Jeremiah, whose text has now been copied in many churches.

38

At about that time father Berno began to lie sick with a mortal illness. He at once summoned the neighbouring bishops and laid down all his office; moreover he declared with tearful voice that he had presided over such a ministry guilty and unworthy. Amid these words he asked the brethren to choose for themselves whomever they wished as father. Then our father was seized by the hands of the brethren, held fast as if by force, and while all cried out that he should be ordained, he was led by force before his abbot. And when even so he would not yield and take

up the place of shepherd, he was at last overcome by the bishops' excommunication. When he had been ordained, within a short time father Berno passed to the Lord.

BOOK TWO

1

Because of many misfortunes and frequent illnesses, I have been able to tell little of our father Odo, and only what he did under his abbot: yet by this your diligence can easily grasp from what great perfection he began. But since the beginning of the blessed life brings with it hardships and labours, while the end of the contest brings glory and praise, I shall therefore hasten as quickly as I can along his blessed and peaceful life, as by a straight path, to his death. So father Odo was elected and ordained abbot, and at once those old persecutors of whom we spoke rose up against him. But he, preferring to give way and rest in blessedness rather than live in contention, left that monastery and all that had been prepared there by the lord Berno and handed over to him as by a father, went to Cluny, and finished the monastery that had been begun there some time before. And the seniors of that place followed him.

2

At that time all the funds he had brought with him for building the monastery's workshops ran

out. All this took place about the feast of blessed Martin. Now it is our custom to celebrate it over a cycle of eight days. When the morning office of the eighth day had been celebrated, before the dawn had yet broken, all went back to their beds, for rest rather than for sleep; and our father used to say that a vision such as this was revealed to a certain old woman. She looked, and behold, a venerable man, adorned with white hair and clad in a shining stole, over which he wore a rain cloak, and carrying a staff in his hand after the manner of bishops: he came nearer and began to inspect the building of the monastery all round. When she asked him who he was, or why he was looking round this building, he said: "I am he whose feast of the eighth day the brethren are celebrating; and I have come to visit them. Tell them not to lose heart, but to persevere in the work they have begun." To this the woman added that all the funds Odo had brought with him had run out. And he said: "Let them not fear. See, I am coming now from Rome and going to Tours. I shall make my journey through Gothia and Aquitaine, and from those parts I shall send them such a sum that they will have abundance for this time and it will last long afterwards." The brethren, then, glad and made secure by the promise of so great a man, began to give thanks to God with all cheerfulness. Who this person was I dare not declare, for it was our father's way never deliberately to name himself; but if he had seen something great or small, he told what he had seen in this manner: "One of our brethren, or a

certain old woman, saw this or that." For as often as he told me this, so often he declared to me that within a few days after this revelation more than three thousand shillings were brought there from the lands of Gothia. So many and such things he used to tell me in this guise, which were done at the monastery of Saint Benedict called Fleury, and likewise at Cluny, that if I dared to write them down in full, the size of the book would stretch beyond the poor powers of its writer. But behold, while we are telling in detail how blessed Martin's most faithful promise was fulfilled, there suddenly comes back to my mind the by no means small help of wild beasts. This, once written down, may perhaps make some readers laugh; but since we have been made a spectacle to angels and to men (1 Cor 4:9), let those who disdain or are unable to imitate us at least have from us a laugh, seeing us advance from good to better: and at last, leaving their mournful life, may they follow with all rejoicing into eternal joys.

3

So when the oratory of the monastery had been built, the brethren went and invited the bishop, as is the custom, to consecrate the place. But he, thinking little of the monks' poverty, came on the appointed day surrounded by throngs and attended by ministers. When the brethren learned of their coming they were overwhelmed with shame, having no fitting provision with which they could receive them honourably. But that morning, as twilight came on, behold,

a huge boar came out of the wood and hurried towards the monastery. The keeper of the church saw it, and since he was outside the monastery, thinking of the adornment of that place, he fled into the church and barred its doors against it. But the boar, laying aside its fierceness, knocked for a long while at those doors, as though asking that someone grant it entrance, and smeared them with the foam of its mouth wherever it could reach. And indeed, since no one was there to open to it for fear, it stood there until the bishop came with his company; and to them it offered itself of its own accord to be killed, fulfilling the word of the psalmist who says: Those who fear the Lord shall not lack any good thing (Ps 34:10-11); and again: They shall not be put to shame in the evil time, and in the days of famine they shall be filled (Ps 37:19).

4

Indeed father Odo once confessed that he had always had the means to sustain the brethren and something to give to the poor. For never did a poor man go away empty from the bosom of his mercy. Every time I went out with him, he would carefully ask whether we had wherewith to sustain the poor; then, if we had all we needed, he went on without anxiety, never hesitating; and because he gave himself to all who asked, by God's will all things were supplied to him. He always had ready to hand that precept of Tobit: See that you do not turn your face away from anyone (Tob 4:7), and: Give to everyone who asks

of you (Lk 6:30). If anyone brought him a gift and seemed poor by his dress, he would at once ask him what he wanted, or whether he needed anything from him. If he asked for something, Odo would at once weigh in a fair balance what the gift was worth, and order him to be given double; and this I often saw him do in many things. I confess my sin, that I was often grieved at such things; and since I was prior, as though sympathising with the poverty of the house and providing for the needs of the brethren, I used to tell him, on the pretext of want, that it was wrong to give everything away so indiscriminately. I thought I was acting wisely, but rather, wrapped in the fog of folly, I was being strangled by the blade of tight-fistedness. But he, being a most skilful physician of souls, felt, as it were, with the hand of discernment the pulse of my error, and with this example healed the wound of my mind. He would say to me: "Be silent; you say this to your own harm. There was a certain young man, given to the study of letters, who one winter's night, as he hurried briskly to Matins so as to be among his fellow pupils in good time, saw a half-naked poor man lying in the forecourt of the church; and, pitying his want, he took off the scapular he was wearing over his clothes and, passing by, threw it to the poor man for his use. Mindful of what he had done, he put the fear of the cold far from him. When the morning praise was over, he went back to his cell, now stiff all over with cold. But when he went to lay his frozen limbs on his little bed to warm them, he found a

pound of gold upon it; and from then on he had in abundance both what to keep for his own use and what to give to others." But I do not know of whom he was speaking. With these and similar examples he laid a poultice on the wound of my perversity.

5

I should like to pass on to other things; but his many mercies compel me to write, and to speak again more fully of his generosity. Yet I know that I cannot do this without shame to myself. Nevertheless I shall write, and plunge the sword of reproof into myself, and then lay bare my faults to all, so that if I cannot now confess these things to him, since he has departed, I may at least gain you as intercessors with him. On his journeys, whatever boys he found by the roadside he would make sing something, and, as if rewarding their play, he would order them to be given something of his own. He said they deserved no small reward. He said these and similar things to gladden us with his merriment and to refresh them with the tenderness of his mercy. For his words were full of all gladness, and his speech, out of very joy, made us laugh. But, holding the reins of moderation in his hand, he would at once set before us a chapter of the Rule, saying: "Not to love much or boisterous laughter"; and again: "Let a monk not be easy or quick to laugh, for it is written: The fool lifts up his voice in laughter (Sir 21:20)." In this and similar ways he restrained us from laughter; but his spiritual cheerfulness planted an inward

joy in our hearts. But what can I, unworthy as I am, say worthily of him, or what can I tell of so great a joy? Indeed, since we could not otherwise satisfy our hearts, we used to kiss his garments in secret. But what wonder is it of us, who clung to him without ceasing? For when he went into the church of Saint Peter, the servants of God and those who went up there to pray came out from every side and ran after him, and catching hold of the edge of the hem of the cloak he wore like a cope, they kissed it. And he went with hurried step as if fleeing, and they followed him like pursuers. For he was like a squared cornerstone, angelic and human alike, generous and gracious, so that every day there seemed to be fulfilled in him what is read in the psalm: Happy is the man who shows mercy and lends (Ps 112:5), and the rest; and again, as the apostle Paul says: For God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:7). He used to say that the blind and the lame would be the doorkeepers of paradise; therefore no one should drive them from his house, lest they shut the gates of paradise against him in the world to come. And if perhaps one of our servants, unable to bear their importunity, answered them roughly, or did not at once give them their accustomed alms, or refused them access to the door of our tent, he would at once rebuke him sharply with threats; then, while he stood by, he would call the poor man and charge him, saying: "When this man comes to the gate of paradise, pay him back in kind." He said this to frighten them, so that they would not do the like again, and to shape them

in the love of charity. And if by the roadside (as often happens) he found an old woman or a sick man, he would at once get down from his horse and set the person on it, ordering everyone to go on ahead at a distance, and charging one of the servants to keep close to the rider and hold them so that they would not fall. He himself walked on foot among us as we rode, and, always singing psalms, made us sing them with him. And if anyone, from shame or from fear of him, wished to dismount, he at once ordered him to stay seated where he sat, knowing that he wished to do it out of reverence for him, and not for the poor man's sake; and I often saw him do this.

6

At the time when we crossed the Cottian Alps with Gerald, bishop of the church of Riez, and came to Rome together, I remember that he did this for a woman possessed by a demon, who was at once restored to health and came with us as far as Siena, and there stayed behind, sick with dysentery. Afterwards we saw her together at Saint Paul's in Rome, and he at once ordered by a sign that she be given a penny. As she sat there abashed, with bowed head and eyes fixed on the ground, I asked who that woman was. He answered: “She is such and such a woman.” And he told me signs by which I might more easily recognise her. On that same journey a feeble old man was crossing those Alps along with us. He was laden with a sack full of bread and garlic, onions and leeks, the stench of which herbs I

could not bear at all. But the loving father, as soon as he saw him, set him on his own horse after his custom, and took that most stinking sack upon himself. And I, unable to bear such a stench, drew my steps further away from the side of the one I was accompanying. When we had finished the narrowest stretch of the higher Alp and were beginning to go down the slope of the mountain, I saw him standing some way off, compelling the poor man to mount his horse again. Even then he did not give the sack back to the poor man, but hung it from the pommel of the saddle. I was going ahead of those who had gone before me, and, to come near him, I went quickly and in shame. And after a little, when I had come up to him, he said to me: "Come here, for there are psalms left that we must sing." When I answered that I could not bear the stench of that sack, he at once rebuked me, saying: "Alas! The poor man can eat what stinks to you, and you cannot bear its smell! The poor man can carry it, and you say you cannot even look at it!" He said this of himself, who was a true poor man of Christ. With these and similar words he rebuked me, and so cured my sense of smell that I never noticed that stench again.

7

About the same time we were sent to Italy by Pope Leo, to act as envoys of peace between Hugh, king of the Lombards, and Alberic, prince of the city of Rome. After not a few dangers we came at last to Siena. That city was suffering

the want of famine. For the undertaking of so perilous a journey we had about thirty silver shillings, of which the greater part had already been given away. Remembering his custom, that he kept nothing back for his own use or ours, and fearing that we and all our people would faint from hunger if we lacked the means to buy food for all, I took what was left of those shillings, slipped away from him secretly, and went through the city without his knowing. As he entered the city, the needy ran to meet him, asking for their accustomed alms. Looking round at them all and not seeing me, he at once understood what I had done. For he knew that, though I was not at hand, I would not be far off; so he beckoned to them all with his hand to follow him, and they did so. As he crossed the square of the city, he saw three men, decked with a certain dignity that kept them from the shamelessness of begging, though they too had fallen into the same want. To these too he gave an occasion to share in his blessing. Before the doors of their house were set little dishes, one each, full of laurel berries. At once he asked one of them at what price they were selling those laurel berries. He named some paltry sum, I know not what; and our father answered him: "Hush, do not name the price you said, but say so many pence." He did so; and Odo at once borrowed that many pence, and so, under pretext of a price, endowed them with his blessing. Meanwhile, as I watched for him to come out, I saw him after a little coming from afar, advancing like a soldier girt for battle,

surrounded by throngs of poor people, but filled with such gladness that when I greeted him after our manner he could scarcely bless me in return. Then I pretended to ask who these were who walked about him, or what they wanted. He said: "These are God's household and our labourers. So make haste and pay them their wages." When this was done, I asked him again what he needed so many laurel berries for, or where he had got them. And he began to speak to us words so many and of such a kind as I never heard from my earliest years, nor hope to hear again. He so gladdened us all that, for very joy, none of us could hold back his tears enough to speak to another. The tears of so great a joy were not yet dried when, bowing low before his fatherhood, I began to beg him not to burden us with the load of those berries, but to send them back to the sellers. But he said: "No, I will not, for I fear they might perhaps send the price after us." At last I could scarcely obtain it, by pointing out to him the remoteness of the place and the length of the road we had already travelled. That same day he foretold to me that I would be prior, and many other things which afterwards befell me. Then he began to teach me how, among the other virtues, I should acquire patience; and beginning with himself he began to tell how much and what things he had suffered from his brethren at the time of his ordination. Which it is not fitting to write now, because of their most holy life afterwards.

8

Before the journey was ended, and before our money had run out entirely, we met our brother Peter the priest, who was then coming to Rome to enter the religious life; our want was enriched from his means, for we took from him wherewith we completed our journey. This happened over two months, January and February. Our road lay over the Amiata mountains. So great a deluge of snow fell in those days that it took from us all knowledge of a road we had once known; and it so filled the folds of everyone's clothes that, our limbs growing numb, we even lost the power of speech. And when I saw his aged limbs wasting with cold, I made him a light tunic that might protect and warm his body. When the embassy was completed, we were pressed by our people to return by way of the coast. And it came to pass, when we had reached the place commonly called Burrianum, as the sun was already setting into the Ocean, that we met a half-naked poor man, whose appearance, as I could not take it in at the time, so I have never been able to recall it since. This much I do remember: that with bare feet and bare sides he trod the vastness of that snow without fear. When our father had drawn near him, he stopped, made everyone go on ahead, and at once stripped himself and covered the poor man, and ordered me to give him besides enough money to finish his journey. Then I stayed back a little and asked him where he was going, knowing that there was no place to turn aside to in that vast solitude. He said he could reach the shepherds' stronghold while it was still day.

From his words I knew for certain that he who had appeared was no mere man, for the stretch of road which he promised to cover in a single hour we barely covered in almost the whole length of a day; and this very thing had been shown to me in the same order in a terrifying vision the night before. So wide indeed was the bosom of his mercy that he did these things not only for the faithful, but opened his hands and stretched out his palms even to his persecutors. Of this I will tell you also the following example, at which Brother Firmus, the brother of the lord Abbot Baldwin, was present.

9

In time past, when the aforesaid King Hugh was besieging the city of Romulus because of his enmity with Alberic, the prince of whom we have spoken, Odo began to go to and fro, within the walls and without, sowing counsels of peace and concord between the two sides, that he might calm the fury of the king and protect the city from so great a siege. Meanwhile one day, as he was going by the monastery of the blessed apostle Andrew which is called by the name of the Clivus Scauri, a peasant tried to kill him for the sake of a little flask of water. For, as Scripture says, He who walks in simplicity walks confidently (Prov 10:9); after his manner, harming no one and suspecting nothing, he went along with bowed head. So deeply had the practice taken root in him, the practice of the Rule, that wherever he was, standing, walking or sitting, he went always

with bowed head and eyes fixed on the ground; for which reason in the time of his religious life some jokingly called him the Digger. And it came to pass, as the peasant aimed a blow at his head, that all who were near the road cried out and held back the hands of the striker. Then the sweetest father (unless I am mistaken; I do not know how many pence he borrowed) repaid him good for evil and sent him away a friend. But when this came to the ears of the aforesaid prince, he wished to have his hands cut off. When he heard this, the lord Abbot Odo earnestly begged that it should not be done, and released that peasant safe and unharmed.

10

Spread abroad to many, and to your ears too, is what our father did some time ago for a thief when he came to Rome; and it pleases me to write it down rather that it may not be forgotten than to make it known to your diligence. While he was staying within the city for the sake of prayer, it seemed good to all that our brother, the lord Godfrey, should go out into the field to watch over the grooms of the horses. And it came to pass the following night, when the grooms, heavy with sleep, had dropped off, and he, keeping vigil, was intent on prayer, that a thief came, seized a horse, mounted it and took to flight. The brother preferred to lose the horse rather than break silence; and had he done so, the thief would at once have let the horse go. This, however, he did: he went and woke one of the grooms with a touch, and

showed him by a sign what had happened. When the night was over and morning came, they saw the thief some way off, sitting on the horse, fixed in one place. They seized him and sent him bound to our father, who at once ordered that he be given five silver shillings, saying that it was wrong to send him away without a fitting wage, since he had endured much labour through the whole length of the night. But after I had come, drawn by God, to the monastic life, and then in the course of time had been chosen prior by the brethren, our brethren often pointed that thief out to me; and since he was the son of our miller, as often as his father went against the brethren's wishes, so often they made me demand those shillings back.

11

Since our discourse has turned to the practice of silence, without which a monk's life is to be counted as nothing, it remains for us to go back and range a little over it. For a monk's life is something only so long as he strives to live under silence. Take that away, and whatever he thinks he does well or honourably according to the institution of the Fathers will be nothing.

12

At the time, then, when the most savage race of the Northmen was laying waste the lands of Poitou and Touraine with bloody swords, it happened that two venerable men of that same

community were sent to Tours, for what reason I do not know: one of them was called Archembald, and was well known to me; the other I did not know, and is called Adalasius; men of the highest repute, who have now become fathers of many monks. And it came to pass, while they were on so long a journey and had turned aside to a certain place to rest, that they were taken by those same Northmen that very night in this way. There was a town near the place, which the Northmen fell upon and took by night; while another band of the Northmen, on the move with booty already taken, came to the very place where the brethren were. They could seize them, bind their hands and drive them along, but they could not break their silence. In the morning they reached the appointed place where they had arranged to gather. The brethren drew a little apart from them, and, bound as they were, threw themselves face down on the ground, so that they might finish the course of the psalms and so put an end to their silence. Their prayer was not yet finished when the rest of the band arrived with much booty. Their leader, finding the brethren lying on the ground, asked who they were. They told him in order all they had done, adding that they had been quite unable to make them speak. So he, swollen with barbarian savagery and excessive pride, charged at them on the caparisoned horse he was riding, with his lance lowered as if to strike, putting the fear of death into them and wishing to test whether they were afraid. Meanwhile the crowd that had flocked from every side to this spectacle

shouted and clapped their hands in barbarian fashion. But they, as they were steadfast in spirit, so remained unmoved in body: and this was not done in any mockery, but by right and observance of the holy Rule, under which they longed to die and to live, and never to turn aside from it. But the hand of the Almighty at once turned their merry spectacle into mourning. As soon as the barbarian came near them, the horse he was riding shied sideways, threw its rider to the ground and dashed him against it. A deadly fever at once followed the fall. All fell silent, and in their amazement began to ask among themselves what they ought to do with these men. Having at last taken counsel, they judged it fitting, after the barbarian rite, that one of them should be slain for the life of their leader. Then they began to seek by lot which of them they should kill. But upon men of virtue, numbered in the lot of Christ, the devil's lot could in no way fall. So they were astounded at them and said in wonder that they were more than men, since their lot could not fall upon them. In this way, indeed, they had killed one of their servants. The other servant who survived knew the enemy's tongue very well, and secretly told them in Latin everything they were saying. And we believe that the Comforter of men saved this one for the sake of what he revealed to them. Then they came to them, quickly untied their hands, and through an interpreter began earnestly to beg them for their leader's life; and so at last it came about that they never afterwards presumed to bind them. And this too was won-

derful: one of the brethren wore a golden cross about his neck, and when they found it they did not presume to take it away. They used what food and drink they wished among them for as long as they were with them: so was fulfilled in them that most approved joy which works patience, of which the Apostle says: And not only that, but we glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation works patience, and patience hope. And hope does not disappoint, for the love of God has been poured out in our hearts (Rom 5:3-5). And now, therefore, all you who wear the monastic habit, I beg you to look with me upon the examples of these men, and at last, some time, to give yourselves to silence. Of this good silence Isaiah says: In silence shall be your hope (Isa 30:15); and Jeremiah: It is good to wait for the Lord in silence (Lam 3:26); and again: It is good for a man when he has borne the yoke from his youth; he shall sit alone and keep silence, because he has lifted himself above himself (Lam 3:27-28). Likewise David too cries out of it, saying: I said, I will guard my ways, that I may not sin with my tongue. I have set a guard upon my mouth (Ps 39:2), and the rest; and the apostle Paul: Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus to work in silence and eat their own bread (2 Thess 3:12). We have said this from the prophets of old, so that no one may think this silence was invented in modern times, as some, evilly suspicious, declare. These men the Fathers of the New Testament also imitated, Paul, Antony, Hilarion, John, and lastly the most blessed father Benedict, and very many

others whom we do not list by name for fear of wearying some; whose silence anyone who cares to inquire into it diligently will find abundantly in their catalogue. So, that no one may object to us the quiet of the solitude in which they lived, let us leave these aside, and let our pen turn wholly to the teaching of the Evangelists and take its beginning from the deeds of the Lord Jesus.

13

The first testimony we have in Matthew: Jesus, he says, bade his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he sent the crowds away. And when he had sent the crowd away, he went up the mountain alone to pray (Mt 14:22-23). The second, in Mark: Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he himself sent the people away; and when he had sent them away, he went off to the mountain to pray (Mk 6:45-46). The third, in Luke, runs thus: It came to pass in those days that Jesus went out to the mountain alone to pray, and he spent the whole night in prayer to God (Lk 6:12). Again in the same Gospel: Watch, therefore, praying at all times, that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that are to come, and to stand before the Son of Man. By day he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and stayed on the mount called Olivet (Lk 21:36-37). The fourth testimony, in John, is couched in these terms: But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives, and at day-break he came again into the temple (Jn 8:1-2).

For if the Word of God and Creator of the flesh, while he dwelt among men and preached the Gospel of life, kept silence for a time, you can the more easily understand what we must do; seeing that death and life are in the power of the tongue (Prov 18:21), and that Scripture says: In much speaking you will not escape sin (Prov 10:19), and: A man full of tongue shall not be established upon the earth (Ps 140:12). For if those brethren, when they were beaten and driven along in bonds, would not let their silence be broken by a word, imitating him of whom it is written, Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb before its shearer, without a voice, so he opened not his mouth (Isa 53:7), what will these say, who suffer no violence and are compelled by no one, but of their own accord transgress the laws of the Rule, when they are set side by side for judgement and the cause of both is examined in the sight of God and of the angels? Of this examination holy Church cries out terribly through blessed Job, saying: You renew your witnesses against me (Job 10:17). For punishment always falls most heavily on those who are convicted by witnesses. And they incur the curse of the law who know what belongs to the law and yet do not fear rashly to turn aside from its commandments. Of them the Psalmist says: Cursed are those who turn aside from your commandments (Ps 119:21).

14

There were in our community two brethren, whose names I do not care to weave into this

work, who because of their very grave infirmity had grown used to begging him again and again to order the remedies of medicine to be applied to them, presuming upon their recovery. He, unable to bear their importunity, gave way to their will and granted leave for the medicine they asked for; but first he called them together and told them this example by way of a likeness. "I once saw a brother tormented by a wound like yours, who died before he was restored to his former health." But they, suspecting nothing concerning themselves, called in a physician; and after unremitting torments they never recovered their health. I know of another brother, too, who at the time of his conversion, while he strove to wash away with tears the stains of his past sins, left all other pursuits and laboured without ceasing, night and day, at prayer, compunction and lamentation. And when our most experienced father asked him why he was not at hand with the others to teach or to learn, he told him the truth and openly laid bare the secrets of his heart, and begged him to grant him leave to carry this through, knowing for certain, according to the ordinance of the Rule, that whatever a monk does without the permission of his spiritual father is reckoned to presumption and vainglory, not to reward. Our father said to him: "It remains that this Spirit should depart from you for a season or longer, since your mind is being wounded by the goads of vainglory." At once that brother lost the compunction of which we spoke, and it was barely after half a year, by dint of entreating our

father, that he was found worthy to receive it again. For his words were full of a wonderful weight of gravity, since the holy man, filled with the Holy Spirit, knew not how to speak in vain.

15

In these past days the lord John, bishop of the Church of Nola, related before our brethren and others who were with us that three years ago he had twice gone to Rome and, because his enemies opposed him, had been unable to receive the blessing of that bishopric. Meanwhile the lord Odo was going to Mount Gargano to pray. And when he saw him sad, he asked him what ailed him. When he had told him all that had befallen him, and that, as though bereft of the hope of receiving the order of bishop, he was ashamed to go back to Rome a third time, Odo blessed him and said: "Go again without fear, and know that God has fulfilled your wish"; then he let him go. He took the blessing and went, and within fifteen days it came to him, as our father had foretold. From this we declare without doubt that this man truly had the spirit of prophecy, since his words were confirmed with such authority.

16

I would have you remember, brethren, what last year that pilgrim told you two or three times about our father, the one who declared that he was of our father's household and was hastening to go up to Jerusalem. He said that in the years

when the race of the Northmen was laying waste the lands of Touraine, it happened one day that the Northmen captured a nephew of the lord Odo, not yet reborn in the font of baptism, together with his nurse. Our father was then at Tours. When this was reported to him there, he at once gave himself to prayer, and prayed to the Lord until he learned that the child had been set free. It was not that he grieved more for him than for the other captives; but he was in the gravest anguish for his soul, fearing lest by some mischance the child, without the washing of the font, should be delivered, soul and all, to hell. But among other things we must not pass over what the child's nurse used to tell. The place, she said, to which the captives had been taken lay beyond a certain river so deep that no one could cross it except by boat or by swimming. It was eight days' journey from Tours. And now all hope of seeing the child again was failing. So while the woman stood in this very peril, she was suddenly inspired by the breath of God to snatch up the child and go; and so she did. For she passed so safely through the midst of the enemy's bands that not only did no one detain her, but no one even questioned her. The depth of so great a river she crossed with dry legs, and the length of so long a journey she accomplished in three days, neither hungering nor thirsting nor growing weary, until she reached Tours. By whose merit this was done was at once made clear: for as soon as the child was brought to our father, he had him washed in holy baptism. Then, lifting his eyes to heaven, he

prayed that the child might die; and three days later the child gave back his spirit to heaven. The child's father became a monk. What follows the blessed father told himself, not as things done by him or for his sake; rather, he related from what perils the Lord had delivered him.

17

Once, as he was crossing the bed of the Rhône by boat, with the nobles of that region accompanying him, it happened that one horse tried to kick another, and the plank of the boat took the blow of the kick, at the very spot from which a branch had been cut away when it was hewn. As soon as the knot was knocked out, such a flood of water poured in through the hole that the boat was suddenly filled to the brim. Yet, full as it was, with God at the helm it reached the other bank. And father Odo stayed on board until all had got out. When at last he too had got out, the boat went down into the deep. In this it shines out plainly of what merit this man was, who by his prayers could obtain what Peter and Paul had earned before him, and after them our father Benedict.

18

About the same time it fell to him to come to Rome to pray; but not long after, as he was returning home, his road among the Alps of the Burdones was overtaken and shut in by the vastness of the snow, of which that mountain is

never at any season free. Near that place lives a certain kind of men who are called Marrones, and I think the name took its origin from the province of Marronea. These, having received their hire, guided him, as they are accustomed to do for others too, for otherwise no one can cross those mountains in winter. For before the sun had closed the bounds of its light, what remained of the day was turned into darkness by the multitude of the snow. But as they went on to pass that grim and perilous place, suddenly the horse on which our father sat put its foot awry, and both together were plunging over the precipice. Then father Odo let go of the reins and, as he fell, raised both hands to heaven; and at once he found the branch of a tree between his arms, and hung from it until those who had gone ahead came back at his cries and took him up. But that branch was never seen again, for no tree is ever seen there, nor does one grow; and the horse never appeared anywhere again.

19

Indeed, since he burned with an impatient love for the peace of kings and princes and for the reform of monasteries, and for this reason ran hither and thither, robbers often laid ambushes for him. One day forty robbers rose up against him. And when one of them, more notable than the rest, Aimon by name, saw him and the brethren who were with him singing psalms without ceasing and making their way as they sang, he was at once pierced to the heart and

said to his companions: "I do not remember ever seeing such men, nor do I think their like has been seen anywhere; so let us leave them alone. There is also an armour-bearer with them, a stout fellow, and so we cannot harm them without danger to ourselves." They answered him: "Let us lift that armour-bearer on the point of our lances, and strip the rest and let them go." To this he replied: "First turn your weapons on me; otherwise, while I live, you shall do nothing to them." And so they parted from one another and went back to their own homes. The robber of whom we spoke went after our father, did penance for his guilt, and from then on ceased from the wickedness of robbery. Nor do we think this came about without reason. For the Spirit to whom he cleaved had filled him with such grace that his cheerfulness not only gladdened the cheerful, but also restored the sorrowful to true joy and made them sharers in everlasting exultation. For his tongue, as Scripture sings, was a tree of life and a soothing tongue and the sweetness of honey; his lips a dripping honeycomb, and the law of prudence in his words (Prov 15:4; Song 4:11).

20

One day, as he was journeying near the territory of brigands, a young robber, seeing the kindliness of his face, was at once pierced to the heart, threw himself at his feet and begged him in a humble voice to have pity on him. When Odo asked him what he wanted, he begged to be

succoured with the mercy of the monastic life. Then our father asked him whether anyone in that parish knew him. "Everyone," he answered. "Go today," he said, "and tomorrow, when you come to me, bring with you one of the leading men of that place." Hearing this, he went away and did as he had been bidden. The next day, when both had come before him, father Odo began to question that great man about the life and ways of the robber. "This young man, father," he said, "is a most notorious robber." On hearing this, the discerning father said to the robber: "Go and first amend your ways, and afterwards seek to become a disciple in the monastery." But he said: "If you cast me off today, I go to perdition, and God will require my soul of you." Then the loving father, moved with compassion, bade him set out and go before him to the monastery; and this was done. After he had spent some time under the probation of the Rule, he was at length made a monk, and they put him under obedience to the brother cellarer. And since he was unlettered, they laid both upon him, the yoke of obedience and the study of letters; and he carried this out so devoutly that he held out one hand to obedience and carried the psalter in the other, imitating that people of Israel who, when they were rebuilding Jerusalem, held in one hand the sword with which to drive off their enemies and put the other to the work of their craft. And so this brother, living out his life in this way, after a short while received the end of the life of his exile. For when he was in the last throes of

life, he called the loving father, begging to speak with him alone. When he asked his pardon, Odo asked him whether he had fallen in anything since becoming a monk. He answered: "Since you ask, through my fault I gave our tunic to a naked man, and I took from the cellar a rope woven of hair." When Odo asked what he had done with it, he said: "To curb the gluttony I once wickedly contracted, I bound my belly round with it." The loving father was astounded at this deed. And when he tried to loose it from his body, the skin which had grown fast to it came away with it, together with the pus. And he went on to say: "This night, father, I was lifted up to heaven in a vision. There came to meet me a woman of most glorious presence and most exalted power, and drawing near she said to me: 'Do you know me?' And I said: 'No, my lady.' And she said: 'I am the Mother of mercy.' And I said to her: 'What do you bid me do, my lady?' And she: 'After three days you will come here at such an hour.'" And so it came to pass. On the third day, at the hour she had named, he died. From this it was plain that what he saw was true, since he departed from this world at the hour she had foretold. And from then on our father kept the custom of calling blessed Mary the Mother of mercy.

21

About the same time, at the pressing need of our monastery, I was sent to Naples. When at last everything the need required had been made ready, it fell to me to return to Rome by sea; and

when I had put in at the city of Porto, I was received by some noblemen who had themselves come from Rome the day before. When I asked them about our father, rejoicing, as it were, over a friend newly found, they told me that among his other works he had done these things at that time, in my absence. This past month of August, on the very day of the Assumption of blessed Mary, our father was in the monastery on the Aventine. He was asked by the lord Abbot Baldwin to celebrate Mass there on that day for love of holy Mary, and with his own hands to give them communion of the Lord's body and blood. He answered that he could not do it; but as they persisted, he at last consented against his will. Then he went into the church, and when he had prayed a little, he began to leave the church. And when they tried to hold him back, he said: "I beg you, let me go, for two of our brethren are at the point of death, and I must go to them quickly, lest they depart while I am away." Then he added: "See, the one who summons me to go is at the monastery gate." He had not yet finished speaking when the messenger arrived, as he had foretold; and when he came to Saint Paul's he went at once and celebrated Mass for brother Benedict, and gave him the body and blood of the Lord as Viaticum; and so that brother gave back his spirit to the Lord. The other was called Gislebert, my cousin, who followed him on the eighth day. Now let us go back, as if round a circle, to former times, and run for a little through greater examples.

22

Three years ago, when we were at Saint Paul's in Rome, the lord Abbot Baldwin asked him to correct for him the book on the life of the most blessed bishop Martin which Gallus and Postumianus composed in the form of a dialogue, and to explain it with short glosses. He at once agreed to his wish, and sending for brother Othegar, set to work on the correction. It happened, while this was being done, that the bell was rung for the hour of Vespers: at once, as the Rule commands, they left what they had in their hands and went into the church, leaving the book open where they had been sitting; and, taken up with the evening prayers, they forgot the book. It was wintertime. That very night such a flood of water poured down that it filled all the workshops of our monastery. Now the place where the book had been left is so situated that the water which runs off its own roof and off three other roofs lying below the upper one is gathered, as it were, into a single channel and falls like a torrent in that one spot; and there the book stayed open until morning, while all those floods of water fell around it. The margins of the book were washed on every side, but the writing remained untouched. In the morning the book was laid before the brethren. And as we all marvelled in astonishment, the wise father said: "Why do you wonder, brethren? Know that the water was afraid to touch the Life of blessed Martin." And he said this with a certain joy. At this one of our

brethren, being rather quick to speak, took up the book and added: "Look and see: this book is old, eaten by worms, washed by water long ago, and so soaked that it is already discoloured with pallid stains. Look at the signs! And our father says that water was now afraid to touch a book it washed long ago? The one does not square with the other." Then the modest father said: "Be silent; do not say such things. For there is none like Martin who can have praise among all nations." Thus he turned what the Lord had done for his sake to the praise of Martin.

23

At that time our father's name began to shine far and wide like a most brilliant star. He became known to kings, most intimate with bishops, dear to the great. Whatever monasteries had been built within their territories they handed over to our father's authority, that he might reform and order them after our custom. Meanwhile he came to a certain monastery, having a few brethren with him in his company, one of whom we knew, Adolf by name; he too passed to the Lord two years ago. When that week was over, on the Saturday towards evening, as our brethren had begun to make ready the washing of feet in the manner of the Rule, it happened that one of the monks of that house passed through the very place where these things were being prepared. And when he saw that brother of ours washing his shoes after our custom, he was moved to anger, broke the silence and began to

say: "Tell me, in what place did Saint Benedict command monks to wash their shoes?" He, after our custom, made him a sign to be silent, for it was not an hour for speaking. For he did not remember what Wisdom says through Solomon: He who instructs a scoffer does himself an injury (Prov 9:7); and again: Do not reprove him, lest he hate you (Prov 9:8). Seeing, then, that he had not answered him, the monk grew violently savage and, inflamed with a raging fire, began to vomit out these words: "You who used to go round the provinces of the world trading, now you have come to preach the Rule to us and to correct the life of your betters! Swearing and forswearing, you were used to carrying off men's goods like a hawk, and now you shamelessly seek to be called blessed by us, as if we did not know your doings. God did not make me a serpent, that I should hiss after your fashion, nor an ox, that I should low; he made me a man, and gave me a tongue to speak." As he kept barking out these and like things without ceasing, our brother withdrew from him with hurried step. The next day, when all this had been recited in chapter, the wretched man not only did not ask pardon, but answered that he had done well, adding moreover that it was not fitting for such a person to rebuke his better. Then our father, indignant at his pride, said with feeling: "Today is the Lord's day, and so no one ought to be saddened. Let this hearing therefore be put off until tomorrow." So it was done, and a little later all rose from chapter. But he was suddenly struck dumb, and three days

later he died without absolution for his words. See how great is the venom of arrogance! By its blade, we find, the life of many monks has been wounded until now; for while they think they know what they do not know, they become fools in their own reasonings, as the Apostle says; for Scripture says: "Whoever will not be a disciple of truth will be a master of error." Of them the Lord speaks also through Amos: They turned back to be without a yoke, and they became a deceitful bow (Hos 7:16). Their likeness, beyond doubt, is borne by those who strive to be called masters before they become disciples, and seek to climb the citadel of rule before they are known to have been subject. Indeed, while still raw recruits they seize the victor's prize, and do not fear to snatch with untrained hand the arms of the bravest soldier, neglecting what Scripture says: "He who is not subject according to the Rule ought not to be set over those who live by the Rule." But because they will not live lawfully, they do not fear to turn the face of their heart away from the precept of the law. Of them the Lord speaks through the prophet: They have turned their backs to me, and not their face (Jer 2:27). For Nicodemus too, a teacher of the law, came to Jesus by night, because he wished first to be instructed, so that afterwards he might teach others. This disease does a twofold harm: first, that by a hidden presumption, as if under the pretext of holiness, it goads the one who harbours it to climb the citadel of mastery; second, that, ruined himself, he seeks to instruct others according to the sect

of his own error; and (what we cannot confess without grief) falling headlong themselves, they strive to drag after them over the precipice some who were standing firm; of whom the Lord says in the Gospel: They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both fall into the pit (Mt 15:14). Their gathering is better called a tavern than a community, for there each does what he likes and does not do what he does not like. Of such it is said through Solomon: A heap of tow is the assembly of sinners (Sir 21:9). This kind of monks blessed Benedict calls the most loathsome. Their way of life he calls most wretched, and so pitiable that he judges it better to be silent about it than to say anything. So, leaving these aside, let us return to the complaint of that monk, and see what blessed Benedict commands about the goods of the monastery. "All the vessels of the monastery," he says, "and all its substance let them regard as the consecrated vessels of the altar." And again: "If anyone treats the goods of the monastery in a slovenly or careless way, let him be corrected." For what else are the shoes or the clothes of the brethren but the substance of the monastery? For if elsewhere he himself commands the weekly servers to hand back to the cellarer the vessels of their service clean and whole, vessels which are of earthenware and cheap, and set apart for the work of the kitchen, what are we to think of shoes, which are dear for their price and must tread the floor of the church? But just as it seems a grave fault for monks to look anxiously after what belongs to others, so it is a

much graver one to neglect their own. For if the rich man is blamed because he feasted sumptuously every day, beyond doubt the servant of God is gravely to blame who longs every day to put on something new, since in the sixth degree of humility blessed Benedict commands that a monk be content with all that is meanest and lowest. For this is why a careless man will not wash his shoes: so that he may throw them into some corner, and they may rot with the pallor of mud, and in the end be of no use either to himself or to the poor, though that same father commands that all old things be given away to the poor. We say this not so that they should go about squalid or glittering after the manner of hypocrites, but that they should keep all their clothes neat and washed, as a certain wise man says:

You who long to be good and seek a seemly life, / love cleanness of body and of soul.

For the precepts of the Fathers are boundaries for those who follow them. Of these the Lord speaks through Moses: Cursed be whoever oversteps his neighbour's boundaries (Deut 27:17). And since that monk was not afraid to overstep this boundary of the precept, he rightly received the sentence of the curse in the very part in which he had transgressed. And this is why that rich man who is said to have been buried in hell confesses that he burns more in his tongue than in his other members. Hence that saying of a certain wise man: By the things through which a man sins, by these is he also tormented (Wis 11:16). Of this the apostle James too: The tongue,

he says, is a fire, a world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body and setting on fire the wheel of our birth. The tongue is a restless evil, full of deadly poison (Jas 3:6, 8). And of it the psalmist says: The Lord will destroy all deceitful lips and the boastful tongue (Ps 12:4). Likewise through Ezekiel: I will make your tongue cleave to the roof of your mouth, and you shall be dumb (Ezek 3:26). And would that he were dumb in tongue, and not cut off from the fellowship of the faithful! What, I ask, is excommunication but separation from the good? For among his other precepts blessed Benedict bound under excommunication what he said about silence, and left it to the discretion of no superior. Therefore whoever has attained to the heights of the monastic life, let him weigh what he does and keep himself clear of that excommunication. Let him always keep in his heart what befell those two virgins who made light of blessed Benedict's command, of whom blessed Gregory makes mention in his Dialogues. But we have dwelt long enough on these things; now let us pass on to others.

BOOK THREE

1

At that same time, while our father was instructing us in the disciplines of the Rule, he had made it his custom to tell us, in careful narration, of the wretched end (I do not say the death) of many monks, so as to curb the impulses of youth

in us and, like a shepherd, to lead us as it were under the rod of fear to the joys of Elysium. One day, while he was setting such things before us, I, submitting myself to his fatherhood, began to ask him to tell us whether the monastic order had collapsed only within the bounds of Italy, or whether it had fallen in like manner throughout the lands of Europe, and how, in what way, and when this had come about. Then he took up the word and began to set these things before us: "Some years ago, while there was still a community of monks at the church of blessed Martin at Tours, they began to abandon their rule of life and their customs, and to corrupt their life and their profession by following their own wills. Leaving off the undyed garments they were used to, they began to go about in dyed cowls and tunics, flowing and trimmed with precious cloth. The shoes they wore were so coloured and polished that they seemed to take on the sheen of glass. For the night Lauds, lest they should stub a foot on anything, they rose with the light of day. These and many like things they did against the laws of the Rule. When God had determined to put an end to these things, one night, as all were at rest and one of them was passing that hour awake, he saw two men enter the dormitory, one of them holding a sword in his hand, whom the other, pointing with his finger, commanded to strike them one by one with these words: 'Strike this one, and this one.' And when he was about to fall with the sword upon the one who was watching these things, that monk cried aloud and adjured

him, saying: 'I adjure you by the living God not to kill me.' At once the striker drew back his sword, and he alone of them all escaped."

2

Again I asked him what fault there was in a monk who, with a pure mind, wore whatever garment he pleased. At this he at once set this example before me: "At the time when the sword of the Northmen was raging in our lands, many of our order, finding a pretext in the enemy, began to leave their own monasteries and to seek again all the things pleasing to human use which they had once renounced. In place of the fellowship of the brethren they kept the company of kinsfolk and friends, and in place of the goods of the monastery they sought to grow rich with property of their own. When at last the garments in which they had left the monastery were worn out, they did not put on the like again, but coloured ones, of the kind we commonly call blue. At that time a certain brother, withdrawing from this plague, sought out our monastery, begging us to receive him. We granted his wish, and at once he renounced everything he had acquired and made it over to the monastery. When the brethren bade him go and gather everything together and bring it to the monastery, he answered: 'As for me,' he said, 'what I have had until now lies under your authority, and to fetch it or to leave it is in your power. Therefore I will not go out of the monastery alone; but command whichever one of the brethren you please to fetch

it. I, however, in obedience to your will, will go with him, and obey his orders as best I know how. But whether I stay here or go there, from now on I shall be stripped of all things.' And indeed, as the brethren held to their decision, he went with the brother on whom they had laid this obedience. And it came to pass that, when they had reached the place where that brother had lived before, he was struck down by a sudden illness and died there. As he lay at the last, the brother who had gone with him poured out to God for his soul prayers the more urgent the nearer he saw him to death. And so it came about that both of them saw this vision: there was a throne set on high, on which Saint Benedict was seen to sit, and before his face stood a countless army of monks. The ascent to that throne seemed to be spread with rich cloths, and on its lowest step lay the sick brother, as though asking pardon. On the right and on the left sat that army of monks; and between the two lay an empty way, open to those who went up. And when that brother had lain prostrate for a long while, one of those who stood by went up to blessed Benedict, pleading for him and saying that it was right to raise him into his presence, that he might say what he wished. He seemed to answer that he saw a man but did not recognise the habit, and that therefore he ought neither to hear the cause nor to judge the life of a man of another order. Hearing this, the brother of our order stripped himself and clothed the sick brother in his own garments, and in that same vision made him ask pardon again. When this was

done, a voice came from above which bade him rise and come up. Then our brother, waking from sleep, at once fulfilled in deed what he believed he had done in his dream; and, as though now at ease about his brother's soul, he shielded his passing with prayer as best he could and fortified him with holy communion. Weigh, then, my son, the saying of the Apostle: Faith without works is dead (Jas 2:26); and, as is written elsewhere: He who says that he knows Christ ought himself to walk as he walked (1 Jn 2:4, 6). Likewise he who professes himself a monk ought to imitate father Benedict in deed and in mind, for it is written: It is not the hearers of the law who are just before God, but the doers (Rom 2:13). For purity of mind alone is not enough for a monk if the tokens and signs of the other works are lacking; of which the Lord says: Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Mt 5:16). Blessed Gregory treats of this more fully in the first part of his Ezekiel, and from his homilies we shall bring forward one testimony. 'As there are two ways of departing from God, so there are two ways in which men become apostates from God. For each man departs from his Maker either in faith or in deed. As, then, he who departs from the faith is an apostate, so he who returns to the very work he had forsaken is beyond all doubt reckoned an apostate by almighty God, even if he seems to hold the faith. The one cannot profit without the other, for neither does faith help without works, nor works without faith.' So let no one recoil at

what we have said, that the brother could not receive pardon nor deserve to go up before his garments had been changed. For no one doubts that it was laid down in the Law what the vestments of the sons of Levi were to be, and of what kind, without which they did not dare enter the sanctuary. Who would dare say that they used the breastplate in place of the shoulder-piece, or put on the linen ephod in place of the tunic of fine linen? For each has its own colour, workmanship and variety. For the devil opposed Joshua the high priest until he was clothed by the angel in other garments; and David, when he wished to rise up against the people of the Amalekites, twice consulted God and received no answer bidding him go; the third time he put on the ephod, and at once heard the voice of one commanding him."

3

So he spoke, and afterwards he added: "Would you have me show you by other proofs how very small a thing it is that greatly dishonours and corrupts?" When I answered that I wished it with all my desire, and he saw me burning for his authorities, he set out examples of these things for me in a brief account.

"In these days two brethren were snatched away by a most sudden death of this kind, though not in one place nor on one day. One of them came to the house of a sister of his, said he was extremely hungry and asked for a meal; his sister at once answered that she had plenty of fish for

him to eat, of whatever kind and at whatever hour he wished. But he, as if indignant, answered that he was sick of fish, adding that he had eaten it without a break for so many years, and said he could no longer bear the sight of it. His sister answered: 'Look, we have meat at hand; eat, then, what you please.' Then he had the shoulder of some animal roasted for him; but, unable to bear the delay of the roasting, he cut off a little piece and threw it on the coals. Then he called for wine and greedily took a mouthful of the meat; but what he took did not pass his throat, nor could he bring it up again, and he lost his life with his food.

4

"The other came at dawn to the house of a kinsman of his and at once asked whether they had anything to give him to eat. When they answered that it was not yet the hour for eating, he added indignantly: 'Ah! All night I have toiled, riding on the obedience laid upon me, and I have not kept silent; and now you make me fast? Bring me something, then, if you have anything.' When they said they had fish, he grew all the more indignant and, filled with arrogant disdain, began to cast his eyes this way and that. Now around his feet there went a flock of crows, which we call hens. Then, as if in a frenzy, he seized a stick, struck the one that took his fancy, and said with furious mouth: 'This shall be my fish today.' The others who stood around, with a certain embarrassment, began to say to him: 'Is it perhaps lawful for you to eat meat, Father?' But

he said: 'Fowl is not meat; for birds and fish have one origin and an equal creation, as our hymn has it.' At his words all fell silent. Meanwhile the hen he had killed, now roasted, was set before him; he tore off a morsel and bit into it. That bite he could neither spit out nor swallow, and it robbed him of life; but before he died he received punches and blows on the neck as the wages of his insolence, to his shame. If your mind is troubled at the death of these two brethren, we now show you by example, as we did above for the one, that they deserved the death in which they were ensnared. For a few grains of lentil Esau lost his birthright. And the people of Israel too, while they were fed with the food of manna, turned back in their hearts to Egypt, longing for the fleshpots they had lately eaten under the yoke of an evil bondage. Of them the apostle Paul makes mention: Let us not desire evil things, as they also desired (1 Cor 10:6). For these men said they were sick of fish; and those murmured, saying: Our eyes see nothing but manna (Num 11:6). And we say this not to lay the fault on food, but on those who use it ill. Hence Paul too says: And make no provision for the flesh in its desires (Rom 13:14). For what he denies it in its lusts, he grants it in its needs. For the three youths cast into the furnace of fire in Babylon, who had refused the royal food, came out unharmed from so great a fire. That same fire burned and killed as many of the Chaldeans as it found. So too Nebuzaradan, chief of the cooks, destroyed the walls of Jerusalem. So let no one be troubled that Elijah in the time of

famine was fed with meat morning and evening; but let him who asks about the food consider the one who served it. For demons often take the form of these birds. Such food was fit for the ministry of ravens, and his fill of it evening and morning earned him hunger. But when he ate bread, he had an angel to bring it, and he was so strengthened that for forty days he needed no refreshment of food. We have said all this to show more fully that the fault lies not in the food but in the appetite. Yet the death of these men became the amendment of many men's ways. Thus the order of monks fell among us; and thus it was corrected, and is often corrected by many prodigies, so that, with God as its author, it may endure." But while we set out to relate more fully the life and teaching of our father, we have somehow, as if unawares and against our will, fallen upon the excesses of these men, and so have strayed far from our purpose; let us quickly turn our pen back to it.

5

Our brethren who served him before us are wont to declare that there was a certain brother of our father's community who, at a time when it was permitted, had himself bled. Our father's mind was stirred at this, because, although necessity had driven the brother to it, he ought not to have presumed to do it without his leave. And soon the vein through which the blood had first flowed burst open, and no remedy whatever could stanch it until he gave up his soul. They

added, moreover, that whether he foretold good or ill to anyone, that person could in no way escape it; would that a certain one of ours had not found this out in himself! But happy were they who were found worthy to look upon his presence as long as he lived. Unhappy I, who was not found worthy to serve him even for two full years.

6

As the time drew near when, by God's dispensation, we were to be parted from each other's bodily sight, and his absence, which was to come, was kindling a stronger fire of love in my mind, one day, seeing me very sad, he began to comfort me gently in his way. But when he saw that even so he could not satisfy my wretched mind, he took his beginning from things past, after the manner of the patriarch Jacob, and with a prophetic spirit began to foretell to me things to come, setting them out thus: "Dearest son, listen to what I tell you. I give thanks to God that for all the sins I have committed since my youth I have already received punishment in this life, except for those I committed against my abbot; and I have always looked for that day and that time, praying God not to keep them in store for me for the hereafter. And now I believe I have been heard, for what I did against him I have received back again from you. But know that to you it will be paid back not singly but tenfold. So be strong and patient, that you may bear it all quietly and endure it." This he said weeping; then, kissing my

head, he commended me to the Lord. But you, almighty Lord, now that Caesarius the priest in his turn repays me a hundredfold and more grievously, spare me in your mercy; and if anything remains of my sorrowful ills, be gracious and turn it away.

7

At the same time the prince Alberic, whom we have already mentioned, granted us the monastery of Saint Elias called Subpentonia, of which blessed Gregory makes mention in the book of the Dialogues. But, as the same blessed Gregory says, it is hard for an old mind to ponder new things; and the monks we found there we could not draw away from eating meat. Our father appointed as prior of that monastery one of our brethren, Theodard by name. He, seeing that neither by virtue nor by holiness could he restrain them from that vice, began to buy fish from the neighbouring regions, so as to satisfy their wishes at least in that way. Because of this the horses our father had left him were utterly worn out with running hither and thither. This importunity of theirs and his own toil the brother took care to make known to our father again and again. Meanwhile, as he asked it of the Lord, the very valley which the monastery overlooks and in which it lies closed itself up not far off, its little hills joining together, and barred the course of the tiny stream that flowed down through it. Then, as the mass of waters gathered, it formed a lake of itself and took the toil away from the

brother, for he no longer needed to buy fish. But by whose merit this was done some ignorant people did not know, because they had not seen openly how it came about, since they had not heard our father's prayer with their ears. This is the way of hypocrites, not of the faithful: those who say such things are ignorant of what the psalmist sings: The Lord has heard the desire of the poor; your ear has heard the desires of their heart (Ps 10:17); and again: He will do the will of those who fear him, and will hear their prayers (Ps 145:19). He had done the like before, too, when he was in Francia at Saint Benedict's; and we set out the account of it the more confidently, as for this we have that same father as a more faithful witness. But first we must relate in faithful words how he took over that monastery, so that our pen may come to what follows as if in a straight line.

8

After the end of the persecution already spoken of, which took place in the lands of Gaul under Nortmund, the most savage king of the Northmen, that the Lord might fulfil for his Church what he had once foretold through Isaiah, saying: For a moment, for a little while, I forsook you, and with great mercies I will gather you. In a moment of indignation I hid my face from you for a little, and with everlasting mercy I will have pity on you (Isa 54:7-8); the brethren of the monastery of blessed Benedict, who had long been scattered hither and thither for fear of the enemy, gathered together again and recov-

ered their own monastery; but (what we cannot say without grief) with bodies united and minds divided they did no more than occupy that most holy place; and this we pass over in few words, lest our pen linger over the life of such men. What we are concerned to tell plainly is how the most blessed father Odo was called and chosen by blessed Benedict, nay rather foreordained. One day, while those brethren sat within the cloister gnawing at one another, one of them, returning from an errand of obedience, met father Benedict before the gates of the monastery; and he at once commanded him: "Go," he said, "tell these brethren: since they will not let me rest, see, I am leaving this house; and let them know that I will not come back to this place until I bring here from the lands of Aquitaine a man who is after my own heart." And when the brother wished to ask his name, he answered his hesitation: "I am, you should know, brother Benedict." So he spoke, and went on his way. So the brother reported what he had been commanded; but the wretches, bereft of so great a father, did not run to tears and prayers, which are often wont to appease even the Lord's threat, but mounted their horses and began to ride hither and thither to find him and, once found, to bring him back by force or by entreaty. But when they had found no one, they afterwards began to mock that brother without ceasing. At that time Elisiard, then an illustrious count and now living in the monastic habit, hearing of the ill repute of these monks, asked Rudolph, king of the Franks, for that abbey and received it,

and once he had it, handed it over to our father. Then, taking with them two counts and as many bishops, they set out together with our father Odo. When the brethren learned of their coming, some took swords and climbed onto the roofs of the buildings, as if to pelt their enemies from on high with stones and missiles. Others, armed with shields and girt with swords, kept watch on the entrance of the monastery, declaring that they would die before they would let them in or receive an abbot of another order. Meanwhile, coming to themselves, they said: "See, we now behold what blessed Benedict lately threatened us with. Alas, for sorrow! Why did we not believe our brother? Truly, all that he told us he has fulfilled in deed. Is not this that Odo of Aquitaine of whom we have often suspected blessed Benedict spoke? Alas! Why did we not send to him first and invite him of our own accord?" Meanwhile, turning this way and that, they sought some means of driving them off. There was among them a brother named Wulfald, young but of good disposition. As he went to and fro between them, they sent him certain royal charters, in which it was laid down that no one from another community should ever at any time be permitted to take the headship of that place. Our father said to him: "I have come in peace, so as to wound no one and harm no one, but to correct according to the Rule those who are uncorrected." With these and like words, though through go-betweens, he kept trying to soothe their minds. But they, seeing that their efforts in no way prevailed, turned to other

devices: now they appealed to the king, now they threatened to kill him. This went on for three days. Then father Odo, without anyone's knowledge, mounted a little donkey and began to ride swiftly to the monastery. But the bishops and the counts who were with them ran after him with their men, crying: "Where are you going, father? Are you perhaps seeking death? Do you not see that they are ready to kill you? The hour you come near them you will surely die. Would you give them joy by your death, and us deadly grief?" Such cries and others like them they sent after him. But, as Scripture says, The just man, bold as a lion, shall be without fear (Prov 28:1); once he had set out on his way, they could in no way turn him aside. I am about to tell of wonders. As he drew near and was recognised by those who had known him before, those who were then resisting were at once moved and changed, so that I can say without doubt: This is the change wrought by the right hand of the Most High (Ps 77:11). Indeed, they at once threw down their arms, went out to meet him and embraced his feet. And no small joy came to all that day. So the cloisters of the monastery received father Odo; all the rest returned to their homes.

9

In those days, moreover, he began to persuade them to give up eating meat, to live sparingly and to possess nothing of their own, and to renounce before all, after the manner of the apostles, the very things they held in secret. But because they

had by no means held the goods of the monastery in common, but had divided them among themselves as each could and pleased, when they saw that what had been allowed them was allowed no longer, they preferred to make a wicked gift of what they had unjustly possessed to their abettors, or rather their squanderers, than to renounce it rightly and according to the Rule. For, having renounced it in word alone, they set about eating up the very things they had given up, together with the rest of what our father had brought with him, so that, when everything was consumed, he would at least, however unwillingly, allow them meat. For this reason they kept demanding fish without ceasing. The loving father, on the other hand, provided them with everything as was fitting, so as to keep them from that one thing. And so it came about that, with him giving and them eating, almost everything was consumed. Our father stood firm, fearless in faith, secure in hope, fortified by charity, knowing that, according to that promise of the Gospel, he would by no means be forsaken: Do not be anxious about what you shall eat, or what you shall drink, or what you shall put on (Lk 12:22). Meanwhile, while these things were going on, Saint Benedict appeared in a vision to a certain brother and, among other things, commanded him to tell our father not to be alarmed at the lack of money, and not to be anxious about getting supplies, he said; and after this he added: "Tomorrow I will send a hundred shillings, and in the following week I will provide him with such

a store of various goods that it will suffice for the needs of the brethren for a long time"; and so it was done.

10

Moreover, very many from the surrounding regions began to flock to the feet of the blessed man and, under his teaching, to take up the way of pleasing obedience, so that afterwards they might deserve to climb to the seats of heaven. So far did the fame of his holiness spread that not only laymen and canons flocked to him, but even some bishops left their own sees and joined his community. Then you might have seen that place, like a land cleared of thorns, bring forth new offspring as though new crops, and, as from the threshing floor, bring to the Lord's barn the grain beaten out by the repeated strokes of his words and separated from the chaff of vices.

11

Another time, as the feast of blessed Benedict drew near, our father resolved to set out from a monastery where he then was to the monastery we have spoken of, so as to keep the night watches devoutly before the body of the blessed man; and so he did. On the night before the feast day it happened that the morning Lauds were sung before daybreak. And when one of the brethren, wearied by the night vigil, had given himself to sleep again, blessed Benedict deigned to appear to him. When he had first made himself

known to him, he went on at once: "Tell the brethren," he said, "that this night I could not be with them, but today I shall certainly be." "And where have you been, lord?" he asked. And blessed Benedict said: "In the island of Britain." And he said: "What did you do there?" And he answered: "Brother Leutfred, who out of pride left this place and crossed the seas, died this night and was taken by the demons. I fought a contest against them and set him free from their power." When he heard this, the brother began to marvel in astonishment at what had been done. And the holy father said to him again: "If you marvel at this deed, hear more. Know for certain that from the day this monastery was built, all the brethren who have passed away here have been received into eternal rest." Then the brother added: "Since, lord, you have said that you are to be with us today, who will make known to us the hour of your coming, that we may go out to meet you?" And he said: "No one; but I will show all such a sign that no one will doubt my presence." The brother went on to say: "And with what preparation shall we be able to receive so great a father, or with what services shall we wait upon him?" Blessed Benedict answered him: "If you are anxious about finer fare, you have fish in plenty." "By no means, lord," he said. And the saint said: "Let the fishermen be ordered not to go to the bed of the Loire to fish, but to this marsh that flows in beside the monastery." Having heard this, the brother woke from sleep and, when it was time to speak, took care to make known to the brethren all

that he had been commanded. So the brethren, sure of the father's coming and instructed by the admonition of our father Odo, each strove to offer spiritual gifts from his own heart to the spiritual father. So it was that they spent that day in spiritual hymns and prayers. Meanwhile the servants of the monastery who were charged with the fishing did not go to the marsh, as they had been ordered, but to the river Loire, from which they had been kept away. So it came about that, tired though they were, they returned to the monastery about the third hour without any gain. When they were asked why they had come back empty-handed, confounded by the presumption of their disobedience, they blushed to confess what they had done. But the silence that shame imposed, the blush on their faces unlocked. The steward said to them: "I know your presumption. But since you refused what you were first commanded, go back now a second time to the marsh to fish." And so it was done. And indeed in this fishing they suddenly drew out so many fish that hardly anyone doubted that he who in the region of the desert had given the people quails was then also pouring fish into that marsh. And indeed they abound there to such a degree that they never fail it at any season. And so it came about that the marsh, which before had been wont to teem with frogs, thenceforth abounded in fish. Our father himself set forth this miracle most lucidly, together with the others, in the book he wrote on the coming of the body of Saint Benedict to the country of Orléans, in the

same sense but not in the same words. A great crowd of people had come together for that feast from the surrounding regions, among them very many blind and lame, or paralysed, and stricken with various infirmities, waiting for the time of the meal; and father Odo ordered that none of them be given food before the time of Mass. When the hour came, all went in to Mass. For the church is so large that no one was forced to stand outside. And as soon as they began to sing the angelic hymn, that is, the Gloria in excelsis Deo, the doors of the church were suddenly shaken and thrown open with a great crash, so that all looked behind them, struck with a kind of dread. And in that very crash all the sick who were there were restored to their former health: the blind received their sight, the deaf their hearing, the lame their step. All the lamps of the church, too, were lit. Then all understood that blessed Benedict had come there, as he had foretold. Such spiritual devotion filled the hearts of all that for immense joy they could not hold back their tears. Father Odo refused to make known to me the names of the brethren who saw this. Hence it is doubtful whether it was he himself or another who saw these things.

12

When the moment of his death was now at hand, and the crown of blessed reward was due to him from Christ for his holy deeds, as we have related above, he was at Rome when an acute and continual fever seized him; his limbs were

racked with pain, a cold fire consumed the very marrow together with the flesh, and many and various kinds of suffering rose up together in the one man, so that it seemed certain he was at any moment to be called by the Lord and stripped of the garment of the earthly man. What was the holy man to do? As the faithful imitator and vicar of the Apostle, he now longed to be dissolved, and with all his heart desired to live with Christ. For he had run through the contest of holy labours and completed the noble course of every virtue, so that through the grace of divine goodness he rightly trusted, with all the certainty of hope, that the crown of justice was laid up for him in heaven. Moreover, while he was held in suspense about this call of his, he longed first to visit his Martin to pray, from whom, so to speak, he had drunk in with his very mother's milk the ardour of an inexhaustible love, and to consign to him his last breath together with the ashes of his own body. And since the mercy of almighty God always deigns to be present to holy desires, it was soon present in this our Odo too, whom from his mother's womb he had set apart for himself as another vessel of election. For on the following night the beloved of God saw a man of striking beauty and grace, who said to him in the vision: "O holy soul, beloved of God, your call is indeed at hand, and the final dissolution of your body; but Martin holds you back by his prayers, and grants you both the return to your homeland and the strength for it; and when you have arrived there, at once life will be given you in place of

death, and the blessed company of the elect will be granted you by Christ in reward for your holy labour." Signs soon confirmed the vision: the sickness of his body abated for a while, his health quickly returned, he at once took on the hardship of the journey and, heedless of his aged and half-dead limbs, overcame the hard toil through his exceeding ardour for Martin, all the more devout in his spiritual service as he was the more secure of the reward. So, the road of such great toil accomplished, he came to Tours when the feast of the blessed bishop was at hand, the day on which that conquering spirit departed from the body. Then there was a twofold rejoicing in the city, as Martin's yearly feast was renewed and the long-desired presence of Odo, their fellow citizen, was reverently embraced by all together. How devout the holy man was at that holy feast, what prayers mingled with tears he poured out to Martin, what sacrifices too of a contrite heart he offered as a living victim on that altar of salvation, it is not in our power to unfold, weighed down as we are by dullness of mind and rusticity of speech. For, intent on his call, his mind was fixed on God; and, forgetting now the things of earth, with the pure gaze of the mind, like a true servant born in Martin's house, he contemplated heavenly things alone, ever more intently. So he is held in suspense by this expectation throughout the whole feast of the blessed bishop; but (and this befell him against his hope) he groans in anguish that the promised gifts are put off for three days; when, behold, on the fourth day after

the feast, the fever, revived, flares up again; soon cold blood creeps into his heart and wastes its strength with a bitter wound. Then, his wish now granted and sure of God's mercy, his spirit, weary indeed, grows faint in the sick body;

but his glad mind beholds God, sighs and yearns; / his last word rings out: "You, O Christ, spare the redeemed." / Martin he calls again and again, to Martin he looks up, and prays.

The monks who come from every side, weeping inconsolably over his call, he instructs with his words, commends to God with fatherly prayers, shields with his blessings, and bids farewell with loving sobs. The fourteenth day before December had now come, which is also kept as the octave of Martin's feast, when that blessed spirit, refreshed by that divine and saving unction and quickened by the life-giving cup, loosed from the corruptible flesh, passes free to the heavens and, with Martin as his guide, faithfully presents the manifold fruit of the talent entrusted to him. From him he too receives the fitting reward of his holy labour and, mingled with the companies of the saints, shines with the whiteness of blessed immortality, through Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.