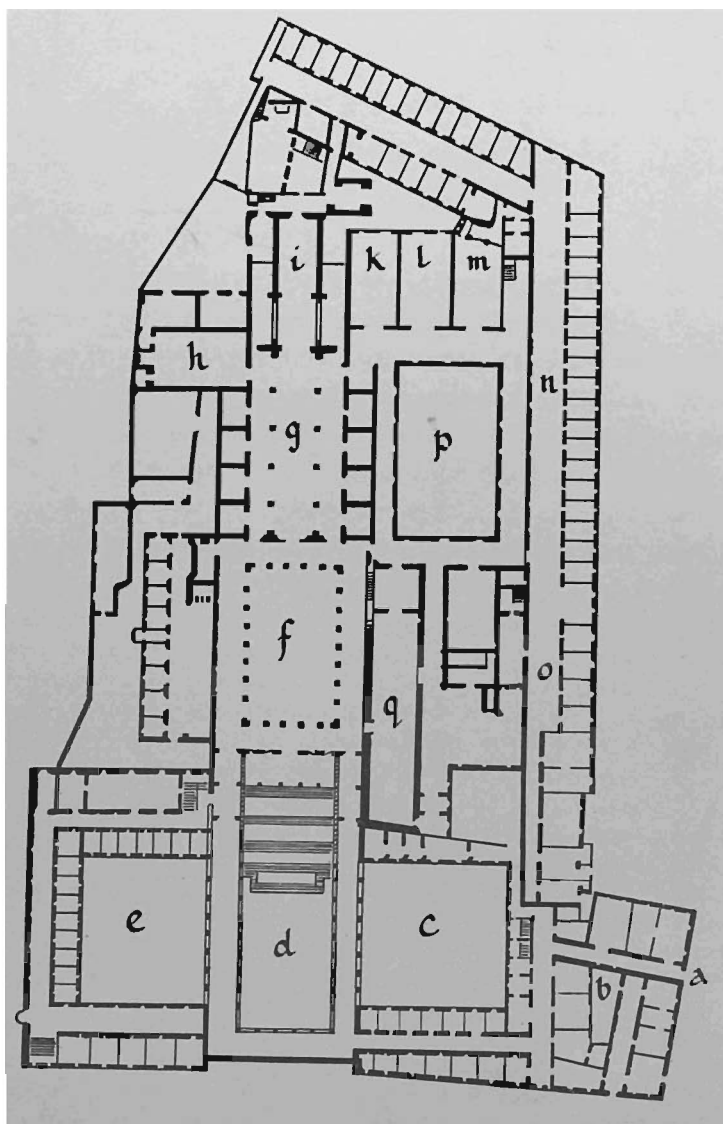


plan of Montecassino



- a. Entrance
- b. "La Torretta"
- c. Guest House
- d. "Loggia del Paradiso"
- e. College
- f. Benefactors' Cloister
- g. Basilica
- h. Sacristy

- i. Choir - Crypt under
- k. Chapter
- l. Old Library
- m. Picture Gallery
- n. New Library
- o. Archives
- p. Prior's Cloister
- q. Refectory

MONTE CASSINO 529-1944

By DOM ROMANUS RIOS, O.S.B.

*Mons bone, salveris pacis dator atque quietis,
Qui facilis regni via crederis esse superni.*

(Alfanus, monk of Monte Cassino, d. 1085—
Cod. Cassin, 280, XI cent.).

THE Editor of the BULLETIN OF THE JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY has asked the present writer to follow up the article on Subiaco, published in the last number of this review, with another on Monte Cassino. The attractiveness of such a theme to a Benedictine monk has succeeded in outweighing the diffidence which one naturally feels in trying to cover so vast a field in a short article, and so, for better or worse, we have attempted in the following pages to give a necessarily inadequate outline of the history of the most famous of all monasteries.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.—The principal sources for the history of the abbey during the Middle Ages are the writings of Paul the Deacon, Leo of Ostia and Peter the Deacon—all monks of Monte Cassino. They may be found, with additions of his own up to the year 1725, in *Abbot Erasmus Gattola, Historia Abbatiae Cassinensis per saeculorum seriem distributa, qua Leonis Chronicon a Petro Diacono ad annum MCXXXVIII continuatum in plerisque suppletur, et ad haec nostra tempora . . . producitur*. 2 vol. in fol., Venice, 1723-1725. Abbot Luigi Tosti, O.S.B., Cassinese. *Storia della Badia di Montecassino*, 3 vol. in 8vo, Naples, 1842. Dom Andrew Caravita, O.S.B., Cassinese. *I Codici e le Arti a Montecassino*. 3 vol., Montecassino, 1869-1870. C. L. Torelli. *Montecassino nella Storia e nell'Arte*, Reggio d'Emilia, 1916. John Minozzi. *Montecassino nella Storia del Rinascimento*, Vol. I (the only one published), Rome, 1925. Excellent and most informative. From pages vii to xx there is a copious bibliography on the subject. A. Mirra. *La Poesia di Montecassino*. Naples, 1929. Dom Th. Leccisotti, O.S.B., Cassinese. *Montecassino*, in *L'Italia Benedettina*, Rome, 1929, pp. 1-40. Dom Ph. Schmitz, O.S.B. *Le Mont-Cassin et son histoire*, in *Mélanges publiés . . . a l'occasion du XIV Centenaire de la fondation du Mont-Cassin*, Maredsous, 1929. Moreover, there are the numerous publications of the present archivist of the abbey, the Maltese Dom Maurus Inguanetz, a professed monk of Monte Cassino.

On February 15, 1944, the Fifth Army surrounding Cassino shelled and bombed the Benedictine monastery which crowned the mountain and which was being used, it was stated, as an artillery observation post by the enemy. In a few hours the

glorious and historic buildings were reduced to a heap of rubble. The news of this tragedy came as a shock to the whole civilized world and from every quarter there came expressions of regret. That the abbey which during fourteen centuries has stood as a symbol of peace should fall a victim to military necessity is a sad commentary on the character of present-day warfare. The question as to whether the destruction of Monte Cassino was militarily justifiable must, of course, be argued before the bar of history. Here we are concerned only with the past, with its alternating lights and shadows, of this world-famed monastery.

This is not the first time that Monte Cassino has been reduced to its present condition. Indeed each of the six periods into which the history of the abbey may be conveniently divided closes with either a total or a partial destruction of the monastic buildings. The periods are :—

(i) 529-581 : from the foundation of the abbey by St. Benedict to its first destruction by the Lombards ;

(ii) 717-884 : from its first restoration by St. Petronax to the martyrdom of Abbot St. Bertharius and his monks by the Saracens ;

(iii) 949-1239 : Golden period. From the second restoration under Abbot Aligernus to the expulsion of the monks by the German Emperor Frederick II.

(iv) 1266-1505 : from the third return of the monks to the incorporation of the abbey into the Congregation of St. Justina ;

(v) 1505-1799 : The Congregational period to the pillage of the abbey by the Napoleonic army ;

(vi) 1800-1944 : the final period of restoration till the recent destruction.

I

Monte Cassino is styled in monastic parlance the *Archicoenobium*, that is, the principal abbey, the archabbey ; because it was the most important abbey founded by St. Benedict, the Sinai in fact of the Benedictine Order. The traditional date of its foundation is the year 529 ; others prefer the year 525. Its founder, St. Benedict, was born at Nursia, c. 480, and while studying law in Rome, determined to become a hermit and retired to Subiaco, c. 500. Here he very soon became the abbot

of a group of thirteen small monasteries dispersed all over the Simbruine mountains. The Roman nobility sent him their children to be trained in the monastic life and a prosperous future seemed to be assured, when the jealousy of a priest compelled the Saint to quit the place, and this gave rise to the foundation of Monte Cassino. Nevertheless, it seems probable that the idea of migrating was already in St. Benedict's mind, since he had evidently already conceived larger plans for the development of his monastic ideal.

Monte Cassino stands almost half-way between Rome and Naples—a bold spur of the Abruzzi Apennines thrust into the fertile plain of the Campania Felix. The Via Latina skirts the mountain, and the Liris and the Garigliano thread their way through the fertile fields at its foot. The small town of Cassino is situated half-way up the mountain. On the top of the mountain the Romans had built a citadel—*Arx Cassini*. During the second half of the fifth century the German Goths had sent down to Italy horde after horde of invaders. After pillaging cities and hamlets, including Rome, they partially destroyed Cassino, c. 490. The citadel too was left in ruins. When St. Benedict arrived there the fortress had been turned into a temple dedicated to Apollo. It is clear from what followed that the whole mountain had become the property of the Saint—tradition says that it was given to him by the Roman Senator Tertullus, father of St. Placid, one of the children trained at Subiaco. St. Benedict's first act was to destroy the pagan temple and to erect in its place two oratories, one to St. John the Baptist and the other to St. Martin, the great exemplars respectively of eremitical and cenobitical life.

At Monte Cassino he finished the writing of the Holy Rule and spent the rest of his life, his death occurring c. 550. From Monte Cassino he founded a monastery at Terracina and another in Rome, St. Pancras, close to the Lateran Basilica. Before his death, in a prophetic vision recorded by St. Gregory the Great,¹ he saw and foretold the destruction of his own beloved abbey. His remains, together with those of his sister St. Scholastica who

¹ *II Dial.*, xvii.

had lived near the abbey as a nun under his direction, were laid to rest in the oratory of the monastery.

Of St. Benedict's disciples at Monte Cassino we know nothing beyond the bare names of his immediate successors in the abbatial dignity : St. Constantine (d. c. 565), St. Simplicius (d. c. 575), St. Vitalis (d. c. 579) and St. Bonitus (d. after 582). The first two are mentioned by St. Gregory the Great ¹; Paul the Deacon is the authority for Vitalis and Bonitus.² Under the last mentioned the first destruction of the monastery took place. In the year 581, the Lombards—or Longobards—coming from Beneventum and led by Duke Zoto (Zotto, Zotton) climbed the sacred mountain, plundered it thoroughly and set fire to the buildings. The monks fled to Rome, where they were sure of a welcome from their brethren at St. Pancras. Pope Pelagius II received them with paternal kindness.

From 581 to 717 no monks lived at Monte Cassino. The abbey remained in ruins. In 672, or thereabouts, a party of French monks coming from Fleury-sur-Loire arrived at Monte Cassino and succeeded in carrying to their abbey—hence called St. Benoît-sur-Loire—the remains of St. Benedict and St. Scholastica.³ It seems that towards the end of this period of desolation a few hermits gathered together in the ruins of the archabbey.⁴

II

Meanwhile, chiefly under the impulse of Pope St. Gregory the Great, the Benedictine observance had spread throughout England, the Netherlands, the Germanies and elsewhere and had found its way back to Italy, where during the seventh century it flourished exceedingly in such great abbeys as Farfa, Novalesse, Civate, Nonantola, San Vincenzo al Volturno, Bobbio and St. Peter *in ciel d'Oro* at Pavia, besides the group of some ten Roman abbeys established in the neighbourhood of the Lateran and the Vatican. Naturally all these far-flung communities turned their eyes towards the ruins of Monte Cassino as towards a

¹ *II Dial.*, i.

² *Hist. Longobardorum*, iv, 18.

³ Cf. *inter alios*, Dom H. Leclercq, article *Fleury* in *Dict. d'Archéol. et de Lit.*

⁴ *Per tutto il secolo VII a Montecassino non vi furono cha alcuni eremiti.* Dom. M. Iguanuez, art. *Montecassino* in *Enciclopedia Italiana*.

desolate Mother, and ultimately the Pope himself, St. Gregory II, undertook the restoration of the archabbey.

The Pope entrusted this task to a nobleman of Brescia who had professed the Benedictine Rule at San Vincenzo al Volturno, Petronax by name. St. Petronax began the work of restoration in 717 (or 718). Soon candidates from all quarters applied to be received, with the result that the community gathered under St. Petronax was unmistakably international in character.¹ Thus, from 729 to 739, we find the Englishman St. Willibald helping to drill the new community in the Benedictine observance which he had professed and practised in England. Then there were the Frenchman Tielbert, an unnamed Spanish monk who had escaped from the scimitar of the Arab invaders of his land, and the German Sturmi, sent by St. Boniface to learn the genuine Benedictine way of life. This is one of the great periods in the history of the Mother-abbey. Pope St. Zachary himself came from Rome to dedicate the new abbey church in 748, and presented the monks with the official codex of the Holy Rule which had been kept in the papal archives.

After the death of St. Petronax (762), the strict observance introduced at the restoration continued unchanged as did also the prestige of the abbey in the eyes of the leading Christian families of Europe. This is illustrated by the monastic profession of such men as St. Carloman (d. 754-55), King of Austrasia and uncle of Charlemagne, and Bl. Ratchis (d. end of VIII cent.), King of the Lombards.

Two saintly abbots, St. Apollinaris (817-828) and his immediate successor, St. Deusdedit (826-834), belong to this period. The latter was the victim of the tyrant Sicardus of Beneventum, who, in order to extort money from the abbey, ill-treated him "and cast him into prison, where", according to the Roman Martyrology (Oct. 9), "he gave up the ghost, overcome by hunger and labours." He was much loved by the poor on account of his generous almsgiving. Under such leaders Monte Cassino became the ideal Mother-abbey. The community, a large one, consisted of Latins, Northerners and Byzantines. The Greek-speaking element was so numerous that for many decades the

¹ Mabillon, *Acta SS. O.S.B.*, iii, II, 177.

daily office was recited in the abbey choir in both Latin and Greek.

A name that shed undying lustre on the archabbey at this period is that of Paul Warnefrid, better known as Paul the Deacon (d. 799), chancellor at the court of Desiderius, the last King of the Lombards. In 780 he was professed a monk at Monte Cassino and eventually became the secretary of Charlemagne and his close friend. He was one of the greatest historians of his century and indeed of all times, as well as a gifted poet. He left behind a "historical" and "poetical" tradition at the abbey which lasted for centuries. Hilderic, another Cassinese monk and poet, was Paul's immediate disciple.

It is from this period onward through the Middle Ages that Monte Cassino stands in a place apart in the history of classical texts. The abbey has been described with good reason as "the centre for the transmission of the Latin and Greek Classics".¹ In fact several important texts have been preserved exclusively by the Cassinese monks.²

With the first restoration of Monte Cassino begins the procession of illustrious pilgrims to the abbey. During the VIII century the list comprises the following names: Pope St. Zachary, St. Pirminius of Reichenau, St. Ludger of Werden, St. Anselm of Nonantola, St. Adhalard of Corvey and last, by no means least, the redoubtable Charlemagne, who ever after remained a fast friend of the monks. He, together with the Lombard King Desiderius and Gisulph II of Beneventum, heaped privileges and grants of land on the abbey, thus originating its rich patrimony, called *Terra Sancti Benedicti*—St. Benedict's land.

The period closes with the martyrdom of Abbot St. Bertharius together with a numerous group of his monks. From the year 845 onwards Italy was harassed by the repeated raids of

¹ Cf. D. M. Inguanez, *L'Opera conservatrice degli Amanuensi Cassinesi*, Monte Cassino, 1929.

² They comprise the following: Varro's *De Lingua Latina*; Tacitus's Books XI-XVI of the *Annales*, I and V of the *Historiae*; Apuleius's *Metamorphosis*, *Asinus Aureus*, *Florida*; Servius's *De Metris Horatianis*; Frontinus's *De Aqueductis Urbis Romae*; Cicero's *Oratio pro Cluentio*. Cf. Dom Inguanez, *op. cit.*; E. A. Lowe, *The Unique Manuscript of Tacitus Histories*, in *Miscellanea di Studi Cassinesi*, Montecassino, 1929, p. 257-272.

the Northern African Arabs. On October 22nd of the year 883 (884? 889?) Abbot Bertharius, a Frenchman by birth (856-? 883), was slain at the very altar, and with him many others—*plurimi socii*. St. Bertharius was an ecclesiastical writer of great distinction.¹ Among other things he wrote a *Life of St. Benedict* in classical hexameters.

The rest of the Cassinese community escaped to Teano taking with them the Codex of the Holy Rule presented to the abbey by Pope St. Zachary. Unfortunately a few years later (896) this Codex perished in the flames which destroyed their temporary abode at Teano—a disaster aptly symbolizing the fate of the monastic observance amidst all these troubles. In 914 the monks took refuge in Capua. Here, like Hannibal's soldiers of old, they relaxed somewhat from the rigour of the Rule. On the advice of St. Odo of Cluny, Pope Agapitus II (946-955) entreated Prince Landolph to order the monks back to the sacred Mountain. This was done in 949 and a new era, in fact the golden period of the abbey, dawned for Monte Cassino.

III

There is a picturesque medieval legend which pithily sums up the part played by Monte Cassino in the life of the Church from the XI to the XIII century. A party of pilgrims from Southern Italy were journeying to Rome by the Via Latina. A day's journey from the Eternal City they met St. Peter who was travelling southward, and asked him whither he was going. "The wars", he answered, "had driven me from Rome, and I am bound for Monte Cassino to find peace in the home of St. Benedict." This indeed happened more than once during the period under review.

The second revival of Benedictine life in the archabbey was accomplished under the Ven. Aligernus, abbot from 946 to 986, who for this reason, and for many others besides, deserves the title of third Founder of Monte Cassino. His successor, Manso by name (986-996), adopted the style of living of a *grand seigneur*, with the result that he greatly scandalized St. Nilus who at that time paid a visit to the abbey, as well as a section of the

¹ His works may be found in Migne, P. L.

community, who accordingly withdrew to Florence where they founded St. Mary's, called to this day *La Badia*. Things improved under subsequent abbots, and the archicoenobium joined whole heartedly in the monastic revival of the XI century and entered into close relations with Cluny.

The heyday of Monte Cassino lasted from 1050 to 1120. During this time three Cassinese monks were elected to the Papacy, and the abbey itself became in a sense a secondary headquarters of the Popes. Frederick of Lorraine, originally a monk of St. Vanne, was summoned by Pope St. Leo IX to the papal service. He became the Pope's chancellor and favourite travelling companion, as also librarian of the Roman Church. Later he was sent to Constantinople as one of the three Legates to Michael Celurarius. On his return in 1057 he was made abbot of Monte Cassino, but he had scarcely entered upon his office when he was elected Pope (Stephen IX, or X). He died in 1058.

He was succeeded in the abbatial chair by Desiderius (1058-1087), after St. Benedict the most outstanding of the Cassinese abbots. A scion of the ducal family of Beneventum, he determined early in life to become a monk. His relatives objected and actually tore the religious habit from his back, but he found his way back to the cloister and eventually, c. 1054, settled permanently at Monte Cassino. In 1058, besides being raised to the abbacy, he was also created Cardinal and papal Vicar for Southern Italy, with the faculty to appoint prelates to vacant bishoprics and abbeys. At the abbey itself his greatest undertaking was the erection of a new church on truly royal lines. It was built in the Basilican style, and according to Leo of Ostia, who gives us a minute description of it, there was nothing to be compared with it for richness in Western Europe. Desiderius hired expert craftsmen from Amalfi, then the commercial entrepôt between East and West, and even from remote Constantinople, and desired them to teach his young monks to work in gold, silver, glass, ivory, enamel and mosaic. The Church was rapidly completed and was magnificent beyond every expectation, being regarded by contemporaries as one of the wonders of Christendom. Abbot Desiderius invited Pope Alexander II

to consecrate it personally in 1071. Meanwhile the great abbot was being employed by the Pope in manifold legations in which his talents were used to the full. It was as the Legate of Pope St. Gregory VII that Desiderius once told the German Emperor to his face and before his courtiers: "By the mercy of God, never again shall a Roman Pontiff be made by a German King". On the death of Gregory VII (d. 1085), Desiderius himself was unanimously elected pope, but no consideration could induce him to accept the dignity. Two years passed before he gave his consent. He was consecrated on May the 9th, 1087, and took the name of Victor III. Even so, he did not give up his residence at Monte Cassino, where he died on September 16th of the same year. His name is mentioned in the Roman Martyrology, and his cult was officially sanctioned by Popes Benedict XIII and Leo XIII. His tomb is—or was?—in the abbey church. To this day at Monte Cassino he is rarely referred to as Pope St. Victor III, but almost invariably as *L'Abate Desiderio*.

His successor as abbot was Bl. Oderisius I (1087-1105), who was also a Cardinal. He is known to history on account of his mediation between the Crusaders and the Emperor Alexius. St. Bruno, bishop of Segni, was abbot from 1107 to 1111: he is perhaps even better known as a theological writer. Among the many other saints and scholars produced by the abbey during this period we should mention first of all the third pope of the archabbey: Gelasius II (1118-1119). John Coniulo was a native of Gaeta and a monk from his early years. He was called to the Roman curia, where he was engaged in secretarial work, introducing new and very efficient methods. He became the chancellor and trusted adviser of his predecessors in the Roman See. He was a man of saintly life. "There seems to be no reason", writes J. F. Loughlin,¹ "why the Benedictine Order should not take up his case for canonization." Other Cassinese Saints of this age were: St. Amicus (d. 1045), who died a hermit at Avellano in the Abruzzi; St. John the Apulian (d. 1055), chosen abbot of St. George at Lucca; St. Aldemar the Wise (d. c. 1060), a famous wonder-worker—*insignis thaumaturgus*—who died abbot of Bocchanico in the Abruzzi; St. Guinizo

¹ In the Catholic Encyclopaedia, art. *Gelasius II*.

(d. c. 1080), a Spaniard by birth, and his disciple St. Januarius (d. c. 1080); St. Alphanus (d. 1085), archbishop of Salerno, styled the Cassinese Virgil on account of his polished Latin lyrics, and even more remarkable as a writer on medicine—*De Quatuor Humoribus Corporis humani*, etc.; Blessed Gibizo (d. c. 1090), a native of Cologne, sent by Gregory VII as Papal Legate to Croatia; St. John (d. 1094), bishop of Marano, near Nusco; St. Benedict (d. after 1112), chosen bishop of Doglia in Sardinia by Pope Urban II; St. Lindanus (d. 1118), founder of St. Cecilia in Sezze, who deserves well of civilization for his draining of the Pontine Marshes; St. Bernard Paleara—or Berard Corsini—(d. 1122), bishop of Teramo.

The procession of saintly pilgrims, especially Benedictines, to the home of St. Benedict, continued uninterrupted: St. Nilus of Grottaferrata, St. John of Gorze, St. Romuald of Ravenna, the Emperor St. Henry II, who wished to remain as a monk, St. Odilo of Cluny, St. Adalbert of Prague, St. Peter Damian, St. William of Montevergine, St. Bernard of Clairvaux.

The list of the men of letters produced by the abbey during these centuries is also very remarkable. Some have been already mentioned. Other writers equally illustrious were: Constantine the African (lolt-c. 1087), born at Carthage, the founder of the school of medicine of Salerno, whose contribution to medical literature was very considerable; Amatus of Salerno (d. 1093), the historian of the Normans in Italy; Leo the Marsican (1045-c. 1118), *alias Leo Oastiensis*, librarian and archivist of the Mother-abbey, who died Cardinal Bishop of Ostia, and whose Chronicle of Monte Cassino from 529 to 1075 (*Legenda Sancti Benedicti Longa*) is one of the most trustworthy documents of Medieval Italy¹; Peter the Deacon (d. c. 1146), also librarian and chronicler of the abbey, but best known as a historical novelist and master-forger²; Erasmus (d. c. 1240), to whom the Church is indebted for having set the feet of young Thomas Aquinas along the path

¹ It was edited for the first time by the Cassinese Abbot Angelo della Noce, with the title, *Chronica Sacri Monasterii Cassinensis auctore Leone Card. Ostiensi*, Paris, 1668. It has been reprinted several times.

² Cf. Erich Caspar. *Petrus Diaconus und die Monte Cassineser Fälschungen* Berlin, 1909.

of sacred learning. He was an eminent theologian and has left behind a collection of Sermons, redolent of the unction of the Fathers.¹

The long standing tradition of poetical composition was carried on by St. Alfano, Amatus of Salerno and Peter the Deacon, mentioned above, as well as by Guaiferio, better known as Benedict of Salerno (d. 1089),² Rainald the Subdeacon (d. 1146) and Alexander (d. c. 1200).³ Finally, Alberic, afterwards Cardinal, was the author of the *Ars Dictaminis*, as well as of an imposing list of other works. A namesake of his won fame by his *Visio*, a poem considered by some as the original source of Dante's *Divina Commedia*.⁴

Monte Cassino, especially during the abbacy of St. Desiderius, became the centre of the new schools of miniature and illumination. Indeed the richest treasures of the archivium consist to this day of the Codices copied and illuminated from the X to the XII century.⁵ Many other Cassinese codices, now scattered throughout the libraries of Europe—such as the *Miracula Sancti Benedicti*, n. 1202, of the Vatican Library⁶—shed lustre on their house of origin. Moreover in the Scriptorium of Monte Cassino was born a new style of script differing in many respects from that produced at the Benedictine abbey of Farfa: this was the Lombard-Cassinese, now called the Beneventan.⁷ There was likewise at the abbey a school of mosaic work; it was this monastic school that decorated with mosaics the Cathedral churches of Capua and Salerno. The influence of this school is traceable to this day throughout Southern Italy.

In the material order, the possessions of the archabbey now extended across the Peninsula from sea to sea, forming in fact an independent territory, known as St. Benedict's Land—*La*

¹ Preserved in the Cassinese Codex 822.

² A. Mirra. *Guaiferio monaco e poeta a Montecassino nel secolo XI*, in *Convegno storico di Montecassino*, 28-29. Maggio, 1930, pp. 199-208.

³ *Idem*. *La Poesia di Montecassino*. Naples, 1929.

⁴ *Dict. d'Hist. et de Géog. Eccel.*, T. I, col. 1407.

⁵ L. Tosti. *La Biblioteca dei Codici Manoscritti di Montecassino*, etc., 1870.

⁶ *Miniature Cassinesi del secolo XI illustranti la Vita di San Benedetto a cura di Dom M. Inganez e M. Avery*. (Dal cod. Vatic. Lat. 1202), Montecassino, 1934.

⁷ E. A. Lowe, *Beneventan Script*, 2 vol., Oxford, 1929.

Terra di San Benedetto, also most appropriately called *Terra di Lavoro*—Land of Labour. Situated as it was between the Papal States and the new Norman kingdom of Southern Italy, it served for a long time to maintain equilibrium between north and south. Of the resulting political importance of Monte Cassino the Popes were well aware and they were able more than once to turn their influence with the abbey to good account. Thus St. Peter found a home under St. Benedict's roof.

Towards the end of this period the abbey was already declining, though its days of glory were by no means past. In 1215 Innocent III confirmed the vast possessions of the monastery and essayed a reform. In 1216 Honorius III again confirmed the properties, granted to the abbot the abbatial insignia, at that time a very exceptional honour, and conferred upon him the title of "Abbot of Abbots" of the Order. In 1219 the same Pontiff addressed a letter to the community inviting them to submit to further reform—significantly enough, one of the first clauses is: *Moderatio ab abbate servanda*. In 1239 the German Emperor Frederick II expelled the monks from the abbey. The young St. Thomas Aquinas was then among the monastic alumni. The buildings were turned into a fortress and its fate seemed to be sealed. But St. Benedict saw to it that it was only for a short time.

IV

The period which now begins, 1266-1505, is one of almost uninterrupted trouble. After twenty-seven years of exile, the monks returned to their monastic home in 1266. They were led by an abbot, worthy of the best days of the abbey, Bernard Aygler, a Frenchman. Born at Lyons, he had joined the abbey of Savigny and been named abbot of Lérins by Alexander IV in 1258. In 1263 he was transferred by Urban IV to Monte Cassino, where he died in 1282. His untiring zeal for the restoration of the past splendour of the archabbey made itself felt in every department of monastic life. He wrote for this purpose a *Commentary on the Holy Rule* and a *Speculum Monachorum*.¹

However, all the efforts of men of good will were powerless

¹ The *Commentary* was edited by Dom A. M. Caplet, O.S.B., Montecassino, 1894; the *Speculum* by Dom H. Walter, Freiburg-im-B., 1904.

to stem the flood of calamities which now beset the abbey. In 1294 Pope St. Celestine V exemplified his lack of administrative tact by forcing the monks of the archabbey to don the white habit of his own Celestine Congregation. This measure proved an utter failure. In 1322 (or 1326) the abbey was turned into a bishopric by Pope John XIII (1316-1334). That this step did not end in the complete secularization of the abbey must be attributed to a special intervention of Divine Providence. The Abbot-Bishop was usually a *foreigner appointed from Avignon*, not a monk, always an absentee and an assiduous appropriator of the monastic revenues, who cared nothing for monastic observance. In 1345-48 the monks were expelled once more and over a hundred soldiers were housed in the abbey, which they converted into a fortress. In 1349 an earthquake overthrew most of the buildings, including Abbot Desiderius's Basilica. For some time the monks had to dwell in huts as best they could. It was precisely at this critical period, when Monte Cassino was almost in ruins, that Boccaccio visited the abbey—probably in 1362—and passed an unfavourable judgment on the community.¹ In 1367, Pope Blessed Urban II, himself a Benedictine, suppressed the bishopric, and undertook, as abbot, to restore monastic life and observance—a task in which he met with considerable success. For a space the monks could breathe once more. But from 1380 to 1450 the abbey became a shuttlecock between the French and the Spanish troops fighting for the possession of Southern Italy. The crowning disaster came in 1454 when the abbey was given in commendam. The last of the commendatory abbots was John de Medicis, afterwards Pope Leo X, who, when he was only eleven years of age, was presented with sixteen great abbeys

¹ Longfellow refers to this episode in his well-known stanzas :—

What though Boccaccio in his reckless way
Mocking the lazy brotherhood, deplores
The illuminated manuscripts, that lay
Torn and neglected on the dusty floors ?

Boccaccio was a novelist, a child
Of fancy and of fiction at the best !
This the urbane librarian said, and smiled
Incredulous, as at some idle jest.

in commendam among them that of Monte Cassino. It may well be asked whether any abbey could flourish under such adverse and distracting circumstances.

Amid these vicissitudes salvation came to the community from an unexpected quarter. In 1505, at the earnest request and through the active co-operation of the Spanish warrior, Gonzalo de Cordova, known to history as the Great Captain, the baneful commendam was suppressed by the Holy See and Monte Cassino was incorporated into the Italian Congregation of St. Justina of Padua. Gonzalo claimed to have been urged to this happy intervention by St. Benedict who appeared to him in a vision. Certainly, he is to be reckoned among the greatest benefactors of the archabbey. As a tribute to the Mother-abbey, the Benedictine Congregation of St. Justina now changed its title into that of *Cassinese Congregation*.

V

The history of the archabbey henceforth belongs to that of the Cassinese Congregation, but this incorporation into a larger body by no means diminished, but rather enhanced, the reputation of the historic community. This period is in many ways a rehearsal of the great days of the XI and XII centuries. It is the age of the Italian Renaissance, and nowhere had the Renaissance keener adherents or a greater influence for good than at Monte Cassino.

The first abbot under the new regime was indeed the very best man whom the Congregation had at its disposal, its own Abbot President, Ignatius Squarcialupi. A monk of St. Mary's at Florence, he had been several times chosen abbot of various houses and finally President of the Congregation. He was an all-round monk; a lover of letters, an efficient administrator, but above all an indefatigable promotor of monastic observance. He was numbered among the leading humanists of Italy, the home of humanism. His writings in prose and in verse are noted for their peculiar charm of style. He was undoubtedly instrumental in fostering at Monte Cassino a taste for the classics, with the result that the monastic humanist became a familiar figure in the following decades. He died in 1526.

The humanistic school at Monte Cassino continued to produce distinguished scholars up to the end of the eighteenth century. Here are a few names: Leonard Sforza degli Oddi, a gifted poet; Augustine Loscos, latinized into *Loschus*, a Spaniard who became abbot of Ferrara; Honoratus Fascitelli, eventually bishop of Imola, the poet-laureate of the Italian Benedictines; Benedict Canophilus, for several years professor of Canon Law in Rome; Angelo de Faggis (1500-1593), born at Castel di Sangro—hence his pen-name *il Sangrino*—abbot of Monte Cassino and President of the Congregation—biblical scholar, theologian, master of Hebrew, Greek, Latin and Italian, author of over forty learned volumes, and withal a perfect monk, who died in the odour of sanctity; Zaccharias Sereno, a knight of Malta who fought at Lepanto before becoming a monk at Monte Cassino, where he wrote his work on the War of Cyprus; Dom Gregory Sayer, latinized into *Sayrus* (d. 1602), an Englishman, graduate of Cambridge and a convert, professor and writer on moral theology, whose works had a decided influence on subsequent moralists and canonists, including St. Alphonsus¹; Angelo della Noce (1600-1691), who died archbishop of Rossano in Calabria, hailed by his contemporaries as *litterariae gloriae decus*; Erasmus Gattola (1662-1725), one of the most lovable of Benedictine men of letters, whom his fast friend Mabillon used to style *l'incomparable Érasme*²; Casimir Correale (d. 1750) who spent thirty years compiling a *Lexicon Hebraeo-Chaldaeo Biblicum* in 99 volumes. These are only a few names: the list could be continued indefinitely.³

The robust life of the abbey during these centuries is evidenced as in former ages, by the artistic, especially architectural, activities of the community. A new school of illumination and painting was started with the advent of Abbot Squarcialupi. He was, as we have seen, a Florentine by birth, born in the heyday of

¹ Cf. E. J. Mahoney, D.D., *The Theological position of Gregory Sayrus, O.S.B., 1560-1602*. Ware, 1922.

² Cf. Gennaro Scotti, *L'Abate Erasmo Gattola, monaco di Montecassino*, Montecassino, 1910.

³ Cf. John Minozzi, *Montecassino nella Storia del Rinascimento*, Rome, 1925; also Dom M. Armellini, *Bibliotheca Benedictino-Cassinensis*, *passim*.

Florentine art, and he invited four celebrated Florentine lay-miniaturists to the abbey: John Boccardi and his son Francis, Maestro Matteo and Loise his disciple. These worked there from 1507 to 1523 and taught their art to many of the younger monks. Thus Monte Cassino became once more a busy centre of artistic achievement.

In the matter of architecture also Monte Cassino owes much to Abbot Squarcialupi. It was under him and his successors that Bramante and Sangallo were invited to undertake a complete restoration of the fabric of the abbey. The result was the Monte Cassino which was destroyed in 1944 with its outer courts—the glorious *Loggia del Paradiso*!—and its interior cloisters of severe yet curiously restful lines. In 1649, by order of the enterprising Abbot Dominic Quesada, Spanish by origin, work was begun on the new Basilica which was erected in the very centre of the already existing buildings and on the highest ground available, thus serving as a crown to the whole (see plan). The work was directed by the Spanish architect Fansaga, then in great demand throughout the kingdom of Naples, and by 1727 the church was ready for consecration, the ceremony being performed on May 19th of that year by the Dominican Pope Benedict XIII. Resplendent with marbles, frescoes and other precious objects, the Basilica was indeed well worthy of its historic status. Its ornamentation was entrusted to the leading contemporary artists of the Neapolitan and other Italian schools: Andrea da Salerno, Solimena, Mazzaroppi, Luca Giordano, Antonio Solaro, Cavalier D'Arpino, Paolo de Matteis, Belisario Corenzio, De Mura, Carlo Mallin (*Il Lorenese*), etc., while the carvings of the choir stalls, particularly the delightful reclining *putti*, were the work of D. A. Collicci (*Il Colliccio*). The large fresco in the refectory was the work of two Venetian painters, the *Fratelli* Bassano, of the preceding generation. All this exquisite beauty has, of course, been utterly lost in the recent bombing.

Space does not allow us to list the illustrious visitors to the abbey during this period. Three, however, must be mentioned: St. Ignatius of Loyola, befriended by the abbot in difficult circumstances, St. Philip Neri, a great friend of the monks, and

Torquato Tasso who found a welcome refuge at the abbey. Another name which deserves special mention is that of the Ven. John Baptist of Brescia (d. 1679), a Cassinese who was sent to help the infant Castro-Cassinese Congregation of Poland, and who left behind him in that country the reputation of a wonder-worker.

The end of this fruitful period came in 1799 with the French armies of Napoleon. The soldiery were turned loose in the sacred edifice. They pillaged and sacked to their hearts' content. They even kindled a huge fire within the precincts of the monastic library. "*Ce qui s'y passa alors*", writes Dom Ph. Schmits,¹ "*dépasse en horreur ce qu'on peut imaginer.*" The climax was reached in 1806 when Joseph Bonaparte secularised the abbey.

VI

Monte Cassino now became officially a *Museum of Arts and Antiquities—Stabilimento d'oggetti d'arte e d'Antiquità*. Fortunately the abbot contrived to secure his own appointment as director with a maximum staff of fifty officials to act as custodians. Fifty monks managed to become officials. They were forbidden to wear the habit, were under military supervision, and were often in want of the necessities of life—always indeed obliged to live from hand to mouth. But they were happy: they could carry on their monastic observance in the surroundings to which their lives had been dedicated. When the Bourbon Kings returned to Naples, conditions improved slightly, owing especially to the fatherly care of the Cassinese Pope Pius VII. Soon, however, the political troubles in Italy connected with the Risorgimento began to tell on the fortunes of the archabbey, in spite of the fact that several of the community were fervent Italian nationalists. From 1860 to 1868 a bitter struggle raged between those who called for the suppression of the archabbey and those to whom such a measure appeared in the light of sacrilege. The conflict assumed international proportions. Mr. Gladstone, then Prime Minister of England, spoke out in

¹ *Mélanges, op. cit.*, p. 24.

favour of the monks. Strong representations were made by the British Government that the suppression of the abbey would outrage the whole of the civilized world. This intervention was only partially successful: the monks were allowed to remain as custodians of the monastery, but it was declared a National Monument. However, the monks were extremely grateful to Gladstone, and his portrait was placed among those of the illustrious benefactors of the archabbey.

Through all these adverse circumstances the monks continued their appointed life of prayer and work. The librarian at this time was Dom Octavius Fraja-Frangipane, a great patristic scholar. From 1840 to 1900 the printing press of the archabbey brought forth a series of noteworthy publications, by such men as Dom Kalefati, Dom de Vera, Dom D'Orgemont, Dom Quandel, Dom Bernardi, Dom Postiglione, Dom Piscitelli-Taeggi, Dom Tosti. The last mentioned is perhaps the most representative writer of the Cassinese community during the XIX century. Dom Luigi Tosti (1811-1897), entered Monte Cassino in 1832 and became a priest in 1833. He was a fervent monk, a fervid poet and an ardent patriot, his whole life being inspired by these three ideals—the monastic, the literary and the patriotic. Between 1840 and 1895 he produced a steady succession of volumes, mainly historical and literary in character, written in a choice and glowing style which has earned for him a place among the modern masters of Italian prose.

During the past half-century Monte Cassino has seen days of great splendour. The first of these was in 1880, when the XIV centenary of St. Benedict's birth was solemnly commemorated at the abbey in the presence of most of the prelates of the Order. It was on this occasion that the *Torretta* (see plan), that is, the part of the building in which according to tradition St. Benedict had lived, was dedicated by Cardinal Pitra, O.S.B. It had recently been decorated with frescoes by Beuronese artists under the personal direction of Dom Desiderius Lenz, O.S.B., founder of the Beuronese school of painting. In 1903, the German Emperor, Wilhelm II, then at the zenith of his influence, made a state visit to the abbey in company with the King of Italy. The abbot at that time was Dom Boniface Krug (d. 1909), a

German by birth, professed in the United States and a great monk. In May (10 to 12) of the year 1913, the crypt of the Basilica, magnificently decorated by the artist-monks of Beuron, was inaugurated by Cardinal Gasparri, as Legate *a latere* of Pope Pius X. Some five hundred Benedictines were present at the ceremony. On the last day, May 12, all the professors, students and lay brothers of the Benedictine University of Sant' Anselmo in Rome travelled to Monte Cassino to assist at the close of the celebrations. The present writer was one of those students and the historic event remains one of the outstanding experiences of his life. In 1929 the same Cardinal returned, this time as Legate of Pope Pius XI, to preside at the celebrations of the fourteenth centenary of the foundation of the abbey. As scarcely two months previously the Lateran Treaty had been signed, the Cardinal's visit to Monte Cassino, at all times a focus of intense national feeling, provided the first of many occasions on which Church and State in Italy were publicly united in patriotic demonstrations. In 1937 it was decided at the Conference of Benedictine Abbots of the whole world, held in Rome, that the fourteenth centenary of the death of St. Benedict should be solemnly commemorated at Monte Cassino in 1943. *Dis aliter visum.*

Of late years the monks of Monte Cassino, besides their perennial duty of solemn liturgical prayer, have been engaged in serving a large diocese of which the Abbot is the Ordinary. They directed and staffed two seminaries, having a roll of some 150 pupils, and a lay college for the sons of the nobility with another 150 boarders. They were in charge of an astronomical observatory. Several of them were naturally employed in the duties of hosts and ciceroni to the hundreds of guests, pilgrims and visitors to the abbey. Several again are universally recognized as scholars of the first rank. A famous member of this category, who died in 1933, was Dom Ambrose Amelli, well known for his biblical, patristic and musical studies. It was he who was responsible for one of Harnack's characteristic dicta. The German scholar once asked Amelli: "What are you doing at Monte Cassino"? "Well", answered the abbot, "what we have been always doing: we pray and we work." "At Berlin",

the Professor sadly added, “ we also work : but I am afraid we have forgotten how to pray.”

The rebuilding of Monte Cassino is a live issue. We would draw the attention of those who are looking forward to that happy event—in other words, to all lovers of civilization, to the lines which Edmund Gurley, of Trinity College, Cambridge, wrote in the Visitors’ Book of the archabbey in January 1872 :

*Innumeros flammaeque hominumque experta furores
Stat tamen et stabit tempus in omne domus :
Moenia mutavit, sed spiritus immanet idem,
Una tuis jungit te, Benedicte, fides.*