

**THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ST.
BENEDICT; PATRIARCH OF
THE MONKS OF THE WEST**

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The Life and Times of St. Benedict; Patriarch of the Monks of the West by O. S. B.

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BENEDICT; PATRIARCH OF
THE MONKS OF THE WEST**



DEATH OF SAINT BENEDICT.

LONDON, W.C.
WALTON STATION
I. O. G. D.

THE LIFE AND TIMES
OF
ST. BENEDICT.

PATRIARCH OF THE MONKS OF THE WEST

ABRIDGED AND ARRANGED

BY

O. S. B.

1812

FROM THE GERMAN BY

THE VERY REV. P. PETER LECHNER

LATE PRIOR OF THE BENEDICTINE ABBEY OF SCHEVERN IN BAVARIA



LONDON: BURNS AND OATES, LTD.
NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO: BENZIGER BROTHERS

1900

1071

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

THIS history of *The Life and Times of St. Benedict* has been translated with the hope that it may increase in some small degree the knowledge of a saint who in good old Catholic days held a place in the heart of nearly every Englishman. That this was so we cannot doubt, seeing that his sons brought to our land the gift of the true faith, and with it all that was noblest and best, and that Benedictine Abbeys were studded over the length and breadth of the country. When the Reformation swept away the monasteries and scattered the monks, devotion to St. Benedict gradually declined and became extinct. Now, however, when a brighter day is dawning for the Church in England, surely it is time to stir up and re-ignite in our hearts the love of our forefathers for a saint to whom we owe so much.

The translation is a very free one, and some stories and traditions culled from old writers have been here and there inserted with a view of enhancing the interest of the book. As regards dates, many of them are the subject of controversy; but on this point it has been thought best to adhere strictly to our author.

As formerly St. Benedict gathered some of the greatest of his saints from our English soil, so may he now reap once again a fresh and yet more fruitful harvest from a land which has so long lain fallow.

O. S. B.

BERGHOLT, 1900.

We have received the following authorisation for this translation from the present Abbot of Scheyern Abbey, the Right Rev. Dom Rupert III. :—

“God be praised that the life of St. Benedict written by our good Prior Lechner, who died on 26th July, 1874, should have been so highly appreciated by our sisters as to have been translated by them for publication. The work will doubtless prove a source of edification to many, besides causing great satisfaction to our Community at Scheyern.

“I gladly avail myself of this opportunity to send my heartfelt blessing to every member of your ‘House of God,’ while I beg a remembrance in your holy prayers both for myself and my Community.

“ ABBEY OF OUR LADY'S ASSUMPTION

“ AND THE HOLY CROSS,

“ SCHEYERN, BAVARIA.”

PREFACE.

ST. PAUL teaches us in his First Epistle to the Corinthians that "the foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that He may confound the wise: and the weak things of the world hath God chosen, that He may confound the strong: And the base things of the world, and the things that are contemptible hath God chosen, and things that are not, that He might bring to nought things that are: 'That no flesh should glory in His sight'." The blessed Benedict was yet a child when, moved and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, -his pure young heart grasped the full meaning of this teaching of the Apostle. Realising its truth, at the first sound of the Divine Voice calling him he left wealth and honour, even home and family, in order to find salvation and everlasting life in Him for Whose sake he renounced all earthly joys. He retired into solitude, and for three years lived in unbroken communion with his Creator, thus satisfying the one object of his desire. After this preparation God called him to be a guide and a teacher to many, though his own attraction and longing was to live hidden and unknown; and the humble youth, who

¹ 1 Cor. I. 27-29.

considered himself the last and the least of all mankind, was chosen to be the legislator whose precepts have been, and ever will be, the foundation of monastic life in the West. Weak and powerless of himself, God endowed him with the gift of miracles to such an eminent degree that the lapse of centuries has but made their fame more widespread; and Benedict, the humble disciple of Christ, has been universally recognised as a great power in the Church, a renowned character in history, an object of admiration to all, and the Patriarch of Western monks. What wonder then that St. Gregory the Great, both Pope and Doctor, considered it a privilege and a pleasure to immortalise in his *Dialogues* the life and miracles of this saint?

Possessing as we do this unparalleled biography, written by one famous alike for his sanctity and his learning, it would seem not only bold, but almost unnecessary, to attempt to bring forward a second. What could be added to the praise already bestowed by St. Gregory? Who could write with greater unction, and at the same time with greater moderation, or pretend to possess his inimitable talent of relating facts in the most comprehensive and yet concise way? Indeed, his work was regarded with such reverence that for a thousand years no one dreamt of compiling a fresh life of the saint; the only thing considered allowable and tending to Benedict's glorification was either to write commentaries on St. Gregory's life or to paraphrase and clothe it with a poetic form.

* In modern times, when printing gave a fresh impetus to every branch of literature, the idea of bringing out the life of St. Benedict in a new and original form commended itself to many minds, and several biographies were published; yet, notwithstanding the talent and diligence which they evinced, they soon fell into oblivion, while St. Gregory's life not only survived, but became even more appreciated, for all felt that his work was endowed with a higher value than that bestowed by human gift or human industry. It may then be asked, with reason, why the present volume has been written, and why the author has attempted what others have tried with little success. The question is difficult to answer satisfactorily, acknowledging as I do that St. Gregory's life cannot be improved upon. The task is a hazardous one, for it seems to demand abilities which I cannot boast of; and not without alarm do I read those words of Kerz that "it would be very desirable for a man like Görres to use the remarkable gifts with which God has endowed him to undertake the portrayal of such a great and holy man as St. Benedict".

My apology then for the present volume must be that I was urged to undertake the task, not only by the entreaties of fellow-monks and the invitation of superiors, but also by men the value of whose judgment in the matter encouraged me to attempt a work of the kind; added to which, my exceeding great love for our blessed Founder made me the more anxious to place one little flower side by side